

CL  
676  
133

PICTURES

OF

# BIRD LIFE

IN

PEN

& PENCIL.

GIBOMELLI



ALBERT R. MANN  
LIBRARY

AT

CORNELL UNIVERSITY



THE GIFT OF  
Alene E. Black



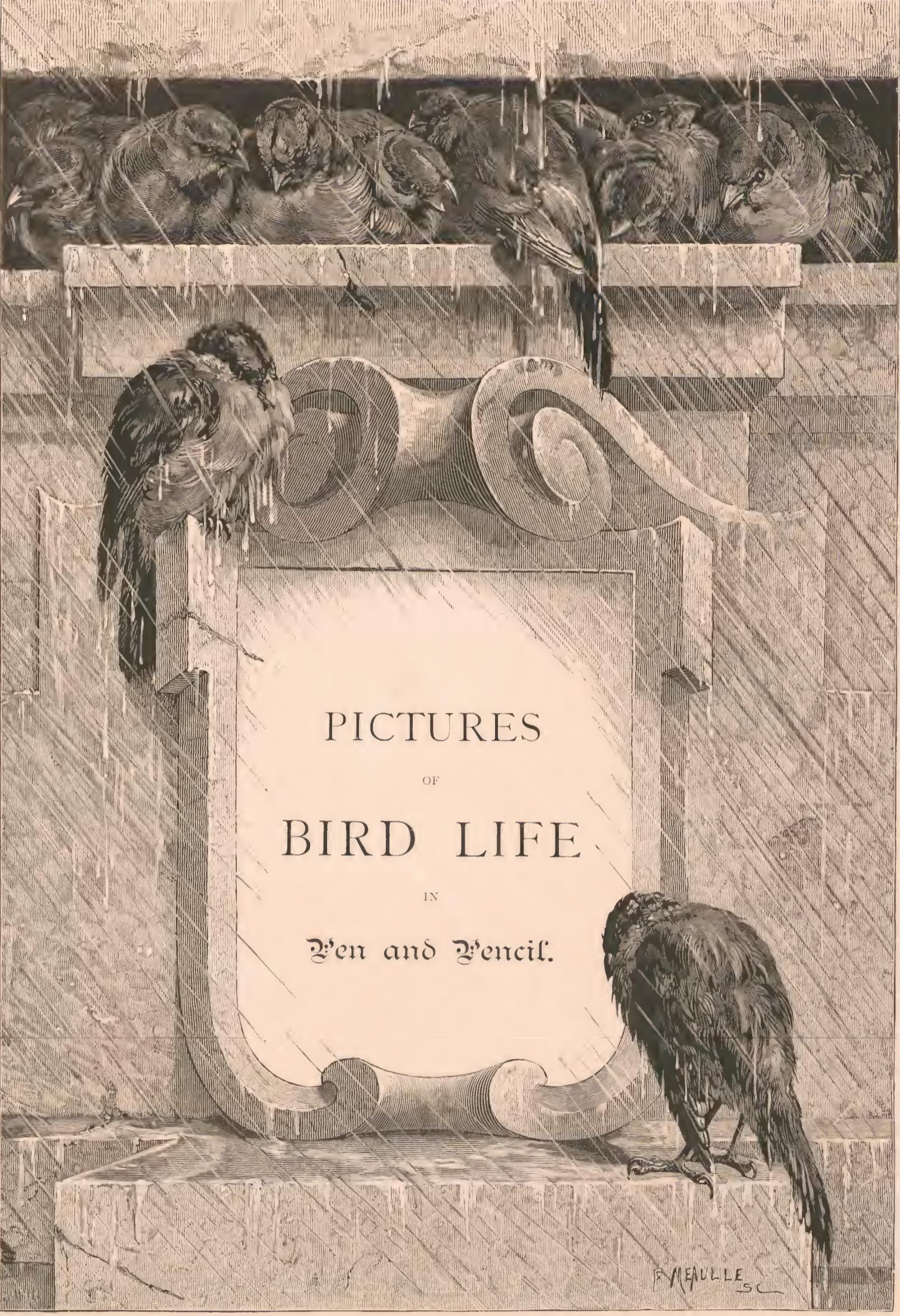












PICTURES  
OF  
BIRD LIFE  
IN  
Pen and Pencil.

F. MEAULES



PICTURES  
OF  
BIRD LIFE

Pen and Pencil.

BY  
THE REV. M. G. WATKINS, M.A.  
  
WITH  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY GIACOMELLI.

---

CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO.:  
LONDON, PARIS & NEW YORK.

JUN  
LONDON  
OVERSIZE  
QL  
676  
W33

LONDON :  
CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO.,  
LUDGATE HILL, E.C.



## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE ROBIN . . . . .	15
THE REED WARBLER . . . . .	25
THE NIGHTINGALE . . . . .	35
THE BLACKCAP . . . . .	45
THE BLACKBIRD . . . . .	55
THE ORIOLE . . . . .	65
THE WREN . . . . .	75
THE TITS . . . . .	85
THE SPARROW . . . . .	95
THE KINGFISHER . . . . .	105
THE SWALLOWS . . . . .	115
THE WOODPECKERS . . . . .	125
THE QUAIL . . . . .	135



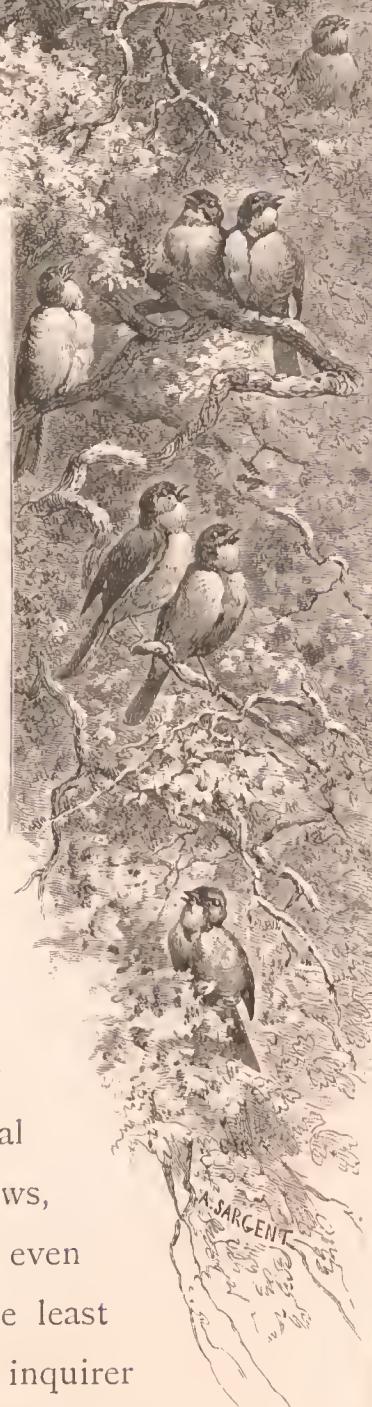
## INTRODUCTION.

---

"What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,  
Linnet? What dream ye when they utter forth  
May-music growing with the growing light,  
Their sweet sun-worship?"

TENNYSON, *Gareth and Lynette*.

THE object of this book is not to add another to the histories of British birds, but to direct those who are fond of natural history to the manner in which the life of our familiar birds should be studied, as well as to point out to those who complain of the dulness of the country that a large and interesting field of observation spreads out before their doors. There is no need in ornithology to make long journeys or undergo many privations in order to find objects which will exercise all the mental faculties. Birds can be studied in the garden, through the windows, from a sick-bed. And let no one think that the life-history of even the ordinary birds of English fields and gardens is exhausted. The least research in books bearing on British ornithology will show an inquirer that the very contrary is the case. He will be struck at a very early period of his literary investigations by the unwelcome conviction that writer after writer blindly follows in the wake of his predecessors, accepting and recounting, often in the same way and almost the same words, what they state. Independent research is here the exception and not the rule. The birds are too often treated in a literary method instead of being carefully studied and observed in their haunts for a series



of years, until the writer can lay claim at all events to having made many observations on if he has not succeeded in solving any of the many problems connected with their distribution, partial migration, and general disappearance at stated seasons. He should be able to propound conclusions based on long attention to the objects of his study, if he cannot altogether fathom the secrets of bird life and movement. Ornithological nomenclature and classification offer special attractions to a certain type of chamber naturalists, one of whom Mr. Marks happily painted a few years ago, arranging his stuffed specimens. And, of course, ornithology and its students cannot afford to neglect the aids which are thus offered them. By such studies the field of comparison is much enlarged, and the species of birds common to different countries mutually throw light upon each other. But undoubtedly the most pleasant and gainful pursuit of ornithology is derived from open-air observation. Not that an out-door student can afford to dispense with the lucubrations of his more scientific brethren, but he can with very little aid from them hope materially to enlarge the boundaries of the subject, to fill up blanks in the life history of the different species which come before his ken—to make discoveries, in short, in an empirical manner which are denied to the mere arranger of birds in new groups and systems. His whole procedure, too, is carried on in the presence of nature; healthful exercise is his, and beauty is presented to his gaze in a thousand different forms of cloud and plant, beast, bird, and insect, till from the universal chorus of praise and harmony arising from the adaptation of all life to the circumstances in which it is placed, the observer falls into the poet's train of thought, discerning—

"Authentic tidings of invisible things,  
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power,  
And central peace subsisting at the heart  
Of endless agitation. Here you stand,  
Adore and worship, when you know it not;  
Pious beyond the intention of your thought,  
Devout above the meaning of your will."

*The Excursion.*

The writer trusts that, from these accounts of bird life and the drawings of Giacomelli, some who might otherwise have neglected so pleasant a pursuit as ornithology may be led to the study of our familiar birds. The group of thirteen here described are selected as a fair sample of the birds to be found more or less during summer near most country houses. Some are with us all the year, others only during the warm weather. Some (such as the reed warbler and nightingale) are local. Several of them can be seen anywhere; others must be sought in their characteristic localities—as for instance the tits, the woodpeckers, and the kingfisher.

One or two are rarely seen, such are the quail and the oriole; but the first of these possesses a special interest, and the other introduces the student to a large family of tropical and American birds. Three of the great orders into which birds are divided—the Passeres, Scansores, and Gallinæ, are thus illustrated. Of the remaining orders, the Accipitres (birds of prey and owls) are now become very scarce, two causes mainly causing their extinction—preservation of game and increase of population. The birds which belong to the Grallatores and Natatores are for the most part birds of the coast and its estuaries, and water-fowl which visit us in winter to compensate for the absence of the migratory warblers. If the thirteen birds and groups of birds which are here described are typical specimens of summer birds, many more remain for observation, some of them more or less rare, and many of the others but little known as far as regards their minor characteristics. Thus Yarrell, in his third edition (1856), gives the numbers of British birds as—

Resident all the year	...	...	...	...	...	...	140
Summer visitors	...	...	...	...	...	...	63
Winter do.	...	...	...	...	...	...	48
Occasional do.	...	...	...	...	...	...	103
							<hr/>
							354

Johns (in 1862), by the addition of a few more occasional visitors, brings the total up to 361. After a still more rigorous examination, and by including all the new species (forty-seven) which had been observed in Great Britain and Ireland since the third edition of Yarrell, Mr Harting (eliminating four birds of Yarrell's list, of which one is a domesticated species, two mere varieties, and one, the Great Auk, now extinct), brings up the numbers to 395.\* This then may be taken as the present state of the British avi-fauna, and of these, in round numbers, 130 species are residents, 100 periodical migrants, and 30 annual visitants, the remainder being rare and accidental visitants.

Nor is the writer without hope that what he has written with much love and enthusiasm for creatures so beautiful and mostly so inoffensive to man as birds may contribute, if it be slightly, to teach kindness and humanity to the lower orders of creation. Bird-nesting, for instance, when followed by boys as a means of acquainting themselves with the wonderful instincts which prompt birds to build their different kinds of nest, and when only an egg or two is taken to form a collection, he sympathises with and would encourage. When it results in nests being ruthlessly torn down which have cost the poor bird (as here described in a few cases) so

\* "A Hand-book of British Birds," by J. E. Harting, F.L.S., Introduction, p. v.

much toil and trouble, and when eggs are wantonly taken to be hung in festoons or carelessly broken, he unreservedly condemns. So, too, birds must occasionally be shot for comparison and scientific purposes, but no one can reprobate more than the writer the senseless custom which prompts so many on seeing a rare bird to shoot it. This it is which has robbed our woodlands of many of their most interesting denizens. Nor can the writer believe that the almost complete destruction of birds of prey through many districts of Scotland is beneficial to the increase of game. Certainly the absence of hawks, owls, and the like greatly diminishes the interest which every true sportsman as well as every naturalist must take in his walks. Fortunately the legislature has of recent years succeeded by the three Bird Bills in protecting many innocent birds from cruel and often useless slaughter. The *Field* newspaper and others are much to be commended for their ceaseless advocacy of the rights of our native birds. It may be hoped, too, that the gradual spread of learning and the advance of cheap and wholesome literature in our country districts will do much more for the good cause of protecting birds and other native animals, such as hedgehogs and water-rats, from the unrelenting persecution of rustics, at present too ignorant and unreasonable to be persuaded to extend immunity and forbearance to these interesting creatures. Without an enlightened love of country sights and sounds, a strong conviction of the sanctity of life, and a reverent heart and mind, these objects can hardly be attained.

“Far less had then  
The inferior creatures, beast or bird, attuned  
My spirit to that gentleness of love  
(Though they had long been carefully observed),  
Won from me those minute obeisances  
Of tenderness, which I may number now  
With my first blessings.”\*

A few, and but very few, of the teachings of the poets about birds and the inspiration they have derived from them, have been added to the description of each bird in these pages. The subject is far too wide, and contains such a wealth of illustration that it could only be touched upon, in order to recommend its prosecution to all who are fond of the intelligent study of birds, especially in its literary aspect. No one can read Shelley’s wonderful “Ode to the Skylark,” or Keats’ exquisite verses on the nightingale, without perceiving how a poet’s fancy may be kindled to produce a music sweeter than the bird’s own song from so trivial a sound as—

“A blackbird’s whistle in a budding grove.”

The effect of a bird’s song upon different poetic temperaments is another very

\* Wordsworth, “The Prelude.”

curious part of this subject. Poets have, for instance, always been divided in opinion whether the nightingale's song is joyous rather than sad, as it seemed to so many classic poets whose minds were prepared for the latter view by the myth alluded to in the following pages. Again the greater power which a bird's song, or the classical associations attached to its name, have over some poets' minds rather than others, is another wide field of research which has as yet been scantily explored. Thus Milton hardly cares to recognise any birds except the lark and nightingale; the latter, as might have been expected from his own late hours of study, his love of music and sympathy with the classical writers, being an especial favourite, which has won from him over and over again some of the most magnificent passages of his own song—

“Thee, chantress, oft the woods among  
I woo, to hear thy even-song.”

The cock, too, from the prominent part it plays in a touching passage of Holy Writ, and from his own habits of prolonging study and vigils until

“The first cock his matin rings,”

is a familiar bird in his poetry. His words must often recur to the mind of his lovers as they listen what time

“The cock with lively din  
Scatters the rear of darkness thin.”

Gray, another poet of essentially classical modes of thought, tempers his admiration for ancient models with many a discriminating touch drawn from loving observation of nature. For him

“The skylark warbles high  
His trembling, thrilling ecstasy;  
And lessening from the dazzled sight  
Melts into air and liquid light.”

And again—

“Far, far aloft the affrighted ravens sail,  
The famished eagle screams and passes by,”

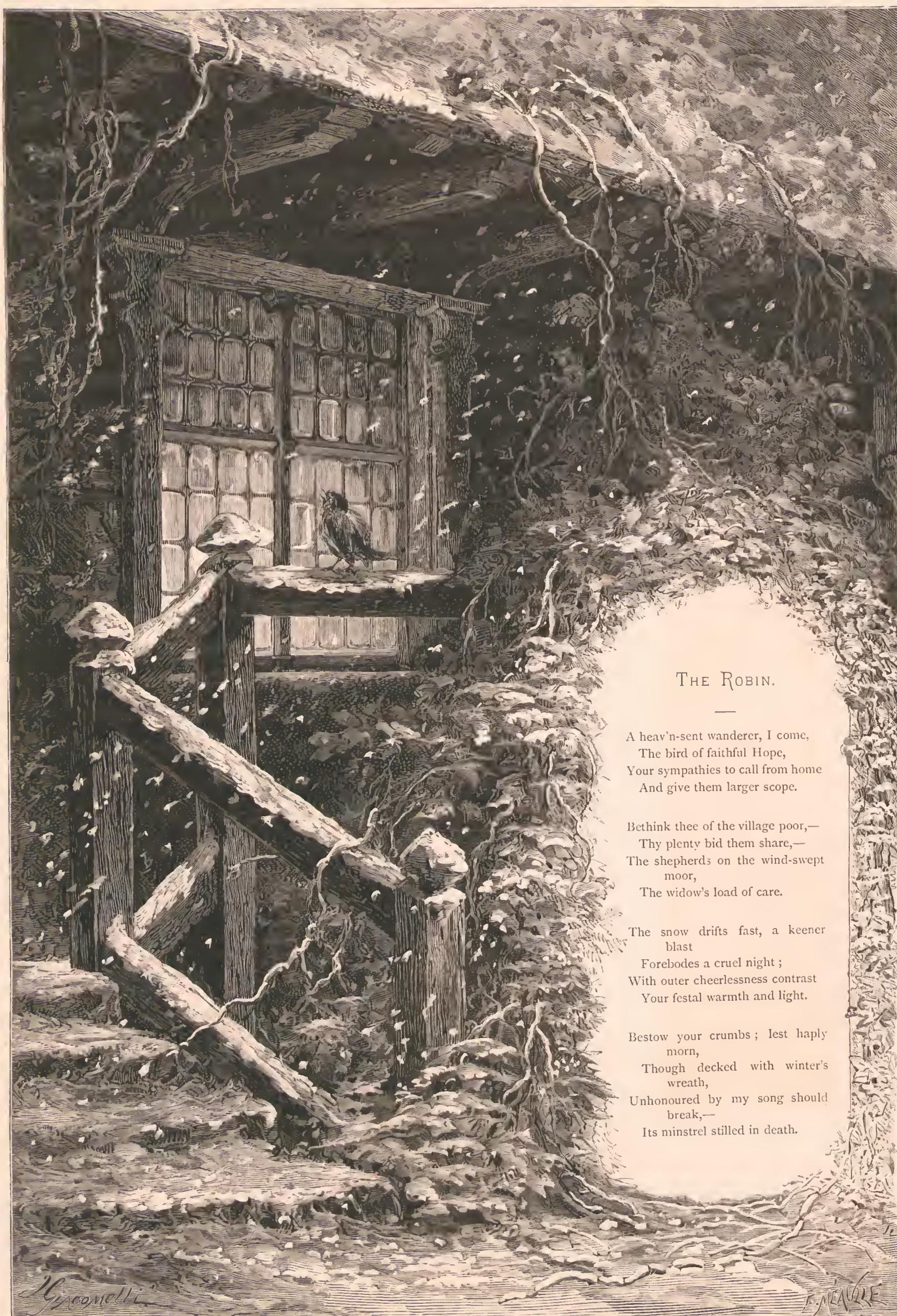
as they may yet be heard and seen in some districts of Scotland. The strength of Shakespeare with regard to fancy and imagination can hardly be better seen than in his treatment of the birds, beasts, and flowers of the country. How lovingly does he dwell upon them all, extracting it may be but a thought from each, and yet those are just the thoughts which mainly endear the objects of his admiration to ourselves! To be named in his verse is for a bird to be embalmed in human memory far longer than has been the existence of the most cherished

objects of love and reverence with the Egyptians, while no *hortus siccus* can compare with the pages of his plays. How universal, too, was his glance, so that the traveller by the Avon can hardly find tree, bird, flower, or reptile on which his eye has not fastened, and forthwith turned it into gold by his alchemy!

Besides the literary associations which our birds possess, a multitude of popular beliefs and ancestral stories are connected with them. It has been another aim of the writer's to direct attention to this side of bird life, feeling confident that it will well repay research and bring its students into closer relations both with their fore-fathers and with birds themselves. Here again it has only been possible to touch upon a tithe of the curious associations of birds which constitute their folk-lore, but he is the less concerned about his omissions as a work treating of the folk-lore of English birds in its entirety is now being composed by a very competent author; which will ere long be published under the auspices of the Folk-lore Society.

The pleasing duty remains of returning thanks to those authors who have so largely assisted the writer. Foremost among these comes Professor Newton, whose edition of Yarrell's "Birds," so far as it is published, is indispensable to every observer of English bird life. The more it is used, the more does the reader regret that its author does not endeavour to continue its issue at an accelerated pace. Twenty years hence at the present rate will hardly see its conclusion, and unfortunately ornithologists are not antediluvians. To the late Mr. Johns' "History of British Birds," and to Mr. Harting's "Handbook and Ornithology of Shakespeare," the writer is much indebted; as well as to Mr. Jesse, Mr. Dixon, Mr. Cordeaux, Mr. J. Harvie Brown, Waterton, and several others whose assistance has generally been acknowledged as used.





### THE ROBIN.

A heav'n-sent wanderer, I come,  
The bird of faithful Hope,  
Your sympathies to call from home  
And give them larger scope.

Bethink thee of the village poor,—  
Thy plenty bid them share,—  
The shepherds on the wind-swept  
moor,  
The widow's load of care.

The snow drifts fast, a keener  
blast  
Forebodes a cruel night;  
With outer cheerlessness contrast  
Your festal warmth and light.

Bestow your crumbs; lest haply  
morn,  
Though decked with winter's  
wreath,  
Unhonoured by my song should  
break,—  
Its minstrel stilled in death.



## THE ROBIN REDBREAST.

(*Erythacus rubecula*, L.)



UNIVERSALLY known and universally loved, not in the British Isles only, but throughout Europe, the Robin is a curious instance of a bird with no very amicable temper becoming a general favourite. This arises partly from the welcome patch of colour on its breast, but still more from its habit of drawing near man's habitations in winter, and its trustfulness when fed by him. The poets have seized this trait. So Chaucer speaks of "the tame Ruddocke," and Wordsworth apostrophises it—

"Thrice happy creature in all lands  
Nurtured by hospitable hands."

And again—

"The bird whom man loves best,  
The pious bird with the scarlet breast,  
The cheerer, thou, of our indoor sadness."

Very familiar also to all is the picture so beautifully drawn by the poet of "The Seasons," whose verses are too little read at the present day—

"The Redbreast sacred to the household gods,  
Wisely regardful of th' embroiling sky,  
In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves  
His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man  
His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first  
Against the window beats; then brisk alights  
On the warm hearth; then, hopping o'er the floor,  
Eyes all the smiling family askance,  
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is."

It would be more difficult to say where the Robin is not found than to name its haunts. He who rests a moment on the dullest road, or halts while shooting

at the side of the loneliest field, hears a rustling beside him, and suddenly a Robin hops out. Even in the depths of a wood, in spots too sunless to be frequented by other small birds save perhaps a wren or a family of titmice feeding, the well-known gay breast of the Robin quickly presents itself. It is fond of the company of the labourer afield, while any one digging in a garden, more especially in autumn or winter, will speedily see one hopping on his wheelbarrow, and when he stops, sitting a moment on the spade, before it flits to the turned-up soil and begins to feed eagerly on its worms and insect treasures. The Robin belongs to the family of warblers, most of which are regular migrants, coming every spring to us, and leaving in autumn. Like the hedge-sparrow, however (which is really a warbler and no sparrow), the Robin continues with us throughout the year. But its movements during the different seasons are very erratic and, partly perhaps from choice, partly because the foliage is so thick during late summer, it appears then to retire more to the fields and lonely spots, whereas in severe weather it invariably draws near to man. Professor Newton remarks that no bird can be more readily studied with regard to this most wonderful mystery of bird life, partial migration. One reason why the Robin seeks seclusion towards the end of summer appears to be in order that it may undergo its annual moult. Finding the young of the previous spring in possession of their garden haunts, on their return the old ones engage them with much fierceness, and the younger are generally worsted in the encounter. The latter, it is supposed, then join those wandering bands which leave our shores for warmer climes. In most parts of the Continent, Robins also take these long autumnal journeys. Even round our houses and homesteads more or less severe weather during winter appears to affect the distribution of the Robins ordinarily found there. Thus any one ambitious of ornithological reputation can find plenty of opportunities for observing migration at his very door if he studies the winter movements of the Robin.

No description of this bird is required. The breast of the female is not so bright as that of the male bird. The young after leaving the nest, with their spotted brown breasts, are like footmen out of livery. The red colour is only assumed after their first autumnal moult, and is then fainter than in the adult bird, and tinged with orange, while the legs are dark brown instead of purple-brown. Robins are often eaten, along with many other small birds which no one in England would think of killing, while on their migration throughout Italy and the south of France. Waterton says—"At the bird market near the Rotunda, in Rome, I have counted more than fifty Robin Redbreasts lying dead on one stall. 'Is it

possible,' said I to the vendor, 'that you can kill and eat these pretty songsters?' 'Yes,' said he with a grin, 'and if you will take a dozen of them home for your dinner to-day, you will come back for two dozen to-morrow.'" It was during one of their partial migrations that the prodigy mentioned in a book of 1641 took place. On October 16, 1637, the Puritan, Dr. John Bastwick, landed as a prisoner at the Scilly Islands, when many thousands of Redbreasts (none of which birds the relation affirms were ever seen in those islands before or since), newly arrived at the castle the evening before, "welcomed him with their melody, and within a day or two after took their flight from thence, no man knoweth whither."

The song of the Redbreast is also well known, and is heard with the greater delight when other birds are mostly silent. Even on dull days during winter it will sing in rich yet plaintive notes. With most people its ditty is identified with the dreary wet days of autumn, when it has recovered from moulting and sings its clearest. Tennyson has cleverly introduced the Robin's song as greeting the long-lost Enoch Arden on his return home in such weather:—

"On the nigh-naked tree the Robin piped  
Disconsolate, and through the dripping haze  
The dead weight of the dead leaf bore it down:  
Thicker the drizzle grew, deeper the gloom."

Save during its autumnal retirement in July the Robin is a perennial songster. "The reason that Robins are called autumn songsters is," says White of Selborne, "because in the two first seasons their voices are drowned and lost in the general chorus; in the latter their song becomes distinguishable." He notes, too, that despite the prejudice in its favour, the Robin (as well as, we may add, others of our soft-billed birds) does much mischief to the fruit in gardens during summer. Frequently two Robins will sing one against the other. This bird sings also very early in the morning, especially in August, when other birds are silent, and after darkness falls in the evening. It is said that when one thus posts itself on a tree or other elevated place and sings for some time, a fine day may safely be predicted for the morrow. White's friend, the Hon. Daines Barrington, found that a Robin could be taught to sing in the style of the nightingale. Its voice must be deficient, however, in compass and power.

The Robin's nest is found in every variety of position—in a bank, at the root of a tree or bush, among withered leaves, or in the hole of an ivy-covered wall. It breeds early in spring. In the mild winter of 1877 we knew of a nest in a garden frame during the first week of February. The nest is made of moss,

dead leaves, and hair, occasionally mixed with a few feathers. The eggs are usually from five to seven in number, of a freckled yellow or reddish-brown colour, and two or three broods are produced each season. It breeds almost up to the Arctic Circle, and is among the first birds to visit Sweden and the latest to leave in autumn. The old bird sits very closely on the nest, evidently depending for concealment on the close assimilation of the nest to the locality where it is placed, but soon abandons the young ones when they are once fledged. Few sights are more miserable in a garden than to see these little orphans hopping about in deplorable plight, scarcely able to use their wings, and a ready prey for cats.

Jesse relates many anecdotes of unusual situations for Robins' nests. A waggon had been packed with boxes and straw at Walton Heath for some days, during which a pair of Robins built among the straw, and had hatched their young. When it was sent down to Worthing, one of the old birds accompanied it, finding food for the little ones from the hedges by the wayside; and as the waggoner took care not to disturb the straw more than was necessary, the young ones, together with the parent, returned safely in the same manner, the distance travelled in the meantime not being less than one hundred miles. Again, "His late Majesty William IV., when residing in Bushey Park, had a part of the mizenmast of the *Victory*, against which Lord Nelson was standing when he received his fatal wound, deposited in a small temple in the grounds of Bushey House. A large shot had passed completely through this part of the mast, and in the hole a pair of Robins had built their nest, and reared a brood of young ones. It was impossible to look at this without reflecting on the scene of blood which had occurred to produce so snug and peaceable a retreat for a nest of harmless Robins." A still more affecting instance of the confidence of the Robin is related of a pair which built for two years together on the Bible as it lay on the reading-desk in the parish church of Hampton-in-Arden, Warwickshire. The worthy vicar would on no account suffer the birds to be disturbed; and another Bible was brought into church, from which he used to read the lessons.

Valentine, in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," is known to be in love because "he has learnt to relish a love-song, like a Robin Redbreast;" but from very early days English poetry has celebrated the Robin chiefly for its piety. Izaak Walton had this in his mind when he spoke of "the honest Robin, that loves mankind both alive and dead." It is to the ballad of "The Children in





the Wood," however, that the Robin is mainly indebted for this characteristic. There it is told how

"No burial this pretty pair  
From any man receives,  
Till Robin Redbreast piously  
Did cover them with leaves."

Naturally Shakespeare did not forget this trait of the bird, and in a beautiful passage of "Cymbeline," says—

"With fairest flowers,  
Whilst summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,  
I'll sweeten thy sad grave: thou shalt not lack  
The flower that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor  
The azured harebell, like thy veins; no, nor  
The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,  
Out-sweetened not thy breath; the Ruddock would  
With charitable bill bring thee all this,  
Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when flowers are none,  
To winter-ground thy corse."—(IV. 2, 218).

And Collins, in strains fully as sweet, to adduce one more example, dwells on it in his dirge—

"The Redbreast oft at evening hours  
Shall kindly lend his little aid  
With hoary moss and gathered flowers  
To deck the ground where thou art laid."

Herrick, too, alludes to the same belief; while Drayton draws the useful moral—

"Covering with moss the dead's unclosed eye,  
The little Redbreast teacheth charitie."

Throughout Germany, as well as in England, this legend of the Redbreast is current.

If this is one side of the Robin's character, it must be owned that he has another, and that not a very amiable set of traits. His very friendliness often degenerates into mischief and impudence, while he is one of the most pugnacious of our birds. The other frequenters of the lawn have a wholesome dread of his approach, and retire from a dainty, to compare little things with great, much as a jackal slinks off from a carcase when the tiger which killed it draws near. During March especially he fights with his rivals on very little provocation, and not unfrequently one of the combatants loses his life in the struggle. We once found a pair of Robins encountering each other with much ferocity in spring. One had its wing broken, and was so injured that we easily caught it; but on putting it down under a neighbouring bush the other immediately flew to it, and

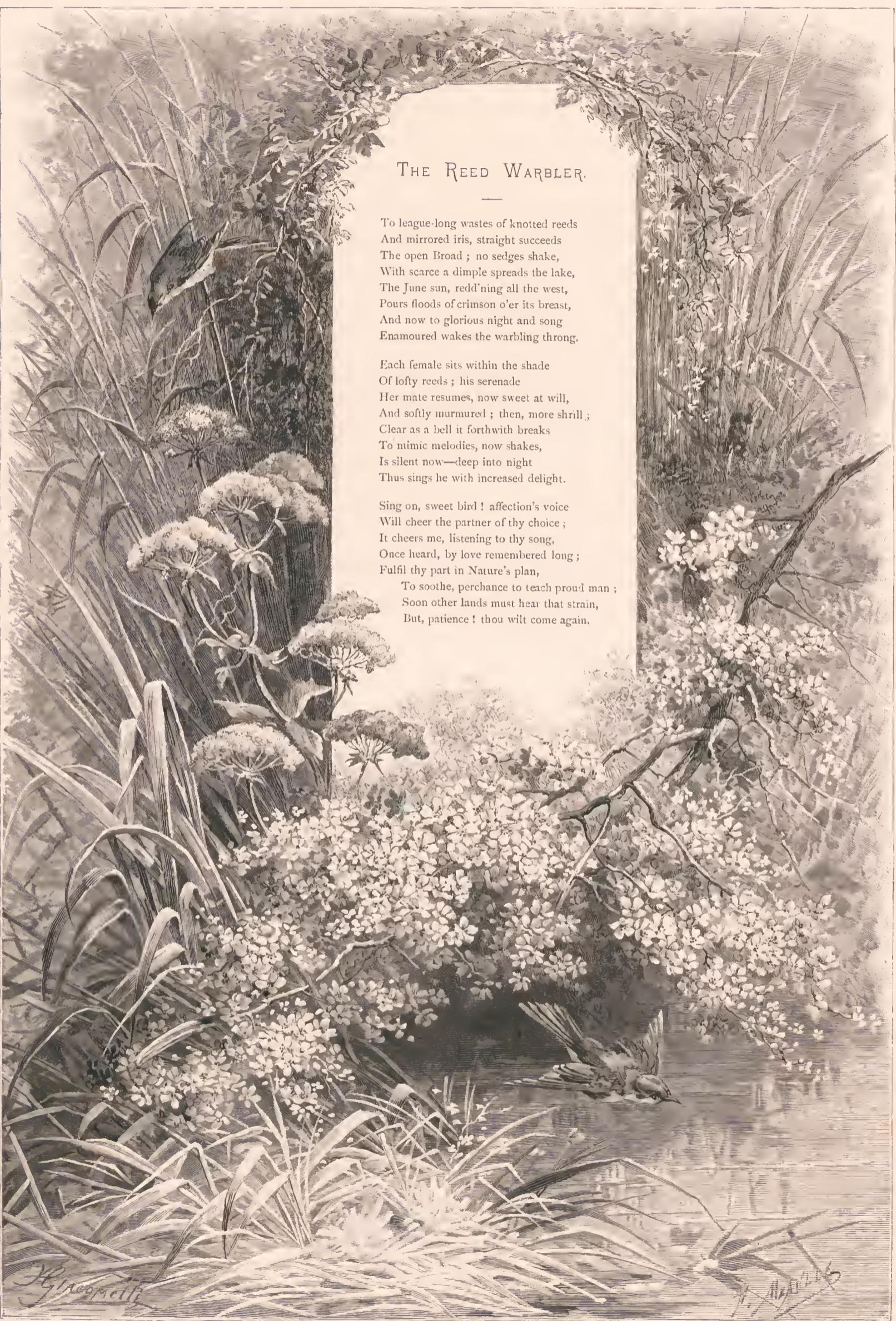
recommenced the battle. Mr. Dixon ("Rural Bird Life," 1880, p. 74) relates how he on one occasion heard a rustling at the edge of a rivulet, and saw a Robin "tangled, as it appeared, in the herbage at the edge." "I took hold," he says, "of the bird, with the intention of releasing it from its captivity, and was about to lift it up, when—judge of my surprise!—I pulled out from under the bank a second Robin, that had evidently, when conquered, tried to seek safety by squeezing under the bank, also in the water. Both birds, like two warriors bold, were locked in deadly embrace, the one first seen being entangled in the breast-feathers of its antagonist by its claws. Their plumage, too, was all wet and ragged, and they had lost many feathers. After keeping them for a short time, I restored them to liberty. The victorious one, I should say, flew quickly off, while its terribly exhausted antagonist just managed to gain a thick bush, and was soon lost to view."

Folk-lore, as well as poetry, has taken the Robin under its protection. Pliny has an old wives' tale how it changes into a redstart during summer. Throughout Germany its ruddy breast rendered it sacred to Thor, the god of the lightning. The Welsh believe that the Redbreast bears drops of water in his bill to assuage the sufferings of sinners in torment, but that, flying too near the flames, his breast is scorched, and he gains the name of "Bron-rhuddyn" (*i.e.*, breast-scorched). He feels the winter's cold more than other birds as he returns from the land of fire, and therefore comes shivering to man for protection. In this beautiful fancy Kelly sees an ancient pagan tradition altered to suit popular notions of Christianity, and points to it as one of the many legends relating to the gift of fire to men from heaven. In Northamptonshire, from something of a similar feeling for the Robin, it is said that weasels and wild cats will neither molest Robins nor eat them when dead. It were well, many lovers of birds will wish, if the domestic cat were imbued with the same reverence, for no bird falls a more frequent victim to its cruelty during winter. The red hue of the Robin's breast is accounted for in Brittany by another beautiful belief, which reminds us of the folk-lore explanation for the crossbill's beak. It took a thorn away from the crown which the Saviour wore on the cross; this dyed its breast, and ever since Robins have been dear to men. In Scotland, however, the song of the Robin is thought to bring ill luck to the hearer if he be sick, and the same belief holds in Northamptonshire. It becomes there a harbinger of death, and is said to tap three times at the window of a dying person's room (Henderson, "Folk-lore").

For many other associations connected with the Robin the reader may be referred to an enthusiastic lecture on it by Mr. Ruskin. He draws out in a curious manner what may be termed the philosophy of its arrangement of feathers, showing how the strength and continuity of its wing-feathers are produced. Its legs, too, for their neatness, finish, and precision of action come in for no small admiration. As for the prettiness of its red breast, he lays down, viewing it in the abstract, and with an artist's eye only, "he can always be outshone by a brickbat." For a good example, however, of the fantastic mode in which Mr. Ruskin blends ornithology, æsthetics, and morals, a characteristic paragraph of his on this point of the Redbreast's appearance may fitly end this chapter. "I said just now, he might be at once outshone by a brickbat. Indeed, the day before yesterday, sleeping at Lichfield, and seeing, the first thing when I woke in the morning (for I never put down the blinds of my bedroom windows), the not uncommon sight in an English country town of an entire house-front of very neat and very flat and very red bricks, with very exactly squared square windows in it, and not feeling myself in any ways gratified or improved by the spectacle, I was thinking how in this, as in all other good, the too much destroyed all. The breadth of a Robin's breast in brick-red is delicious, but a whole house-front of brick-red as vivid is alarming. And yet one cannot generalise even that trite moral with any safety, for infinite breadth of green is delightful, however green, and of sea or sky, however blue.

"You must note, however, that the Robin's charm is greatly helped by the pretty space of grey plumage which separates the red from the brown back, and sets it off to its best advantage. There is no great brilliancy in it, even so relieved; only the finish of it is exquisite" (p. 34). Singularly enough, the eloquent writer forgets to enlarge on the perfect adaptation of the Robin's plumage to its woodland haunts, especially when they are clad in the bravery of autumn. Nor can he find a word for the delightful contrast of its red breast against freshly-fallen snow in winter; and yet these points, it would be supposed, are the first to strike any lover of country sights and birds.



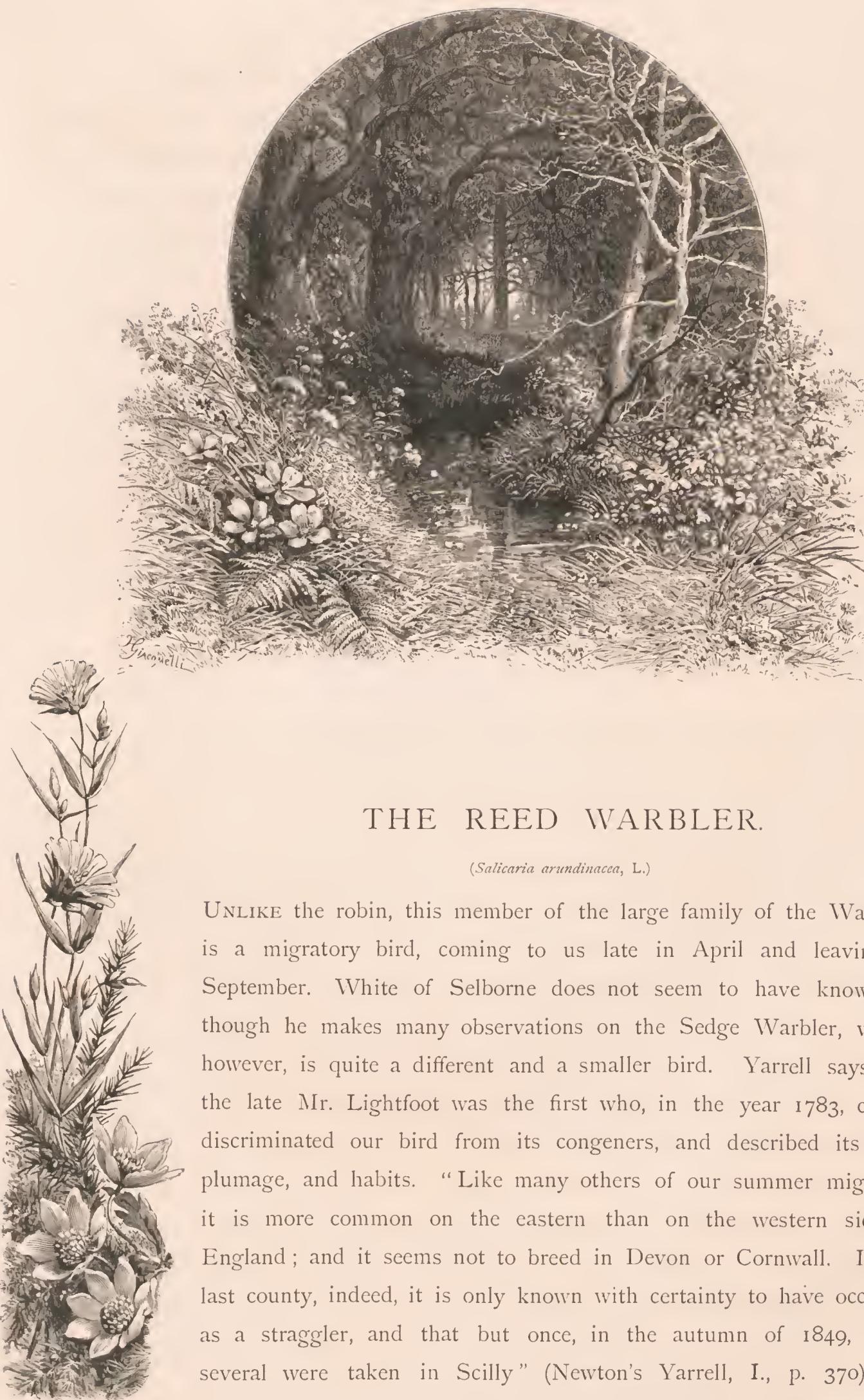


## THE REED WARBLER.

To league-long wastes of knotted reeds  
And mirrored iris, straight succeeds  
The open Broad ; no sedges shake,  
With scarce a dimple spreads the lake,  
The June sun, redd'ning all the west,  
Pours floods of crimson o'er its breast,  
And now to glorious night and song  
Enamoured wakes the warbling throng.

Each female sits within the shade  
Of lofty reeds ; his serenade  
Her mate resumes, now sweet at will,  
And softly murmured ; then, more shrill,  
Clear as a bell it forthwith breaks  
To mimic melodies, now shakes,  
Is silent now—deep into night  
Thus sings he with increased delight.

Sing on, sweet bird ! affection's voice  
Will cheer the partner of thy choice ;  
It cheers me, listening to thy song,  
Once heard, by love remembered long ;  
Fulfil thy part in Nature's plan,  
To soothe, perchance to teach proud man ;  
Soon other lands must hear that strain,  
But, patience ! thou wilt come again.



## THE REED WARBLER.

(*Salicaria arundinacea*, L.)

UNLIKE the robin, this member of the large family of the Warblers is a migratory bird, coming to us late in April and leaving in September. White of Selborne does not seem to have known it, though he makes many observations on the Sedge Warbler, which, however, is quite a different and a smaller bird. Yarrell says that the late Mr. Lightfoot was the first who, in the year 1783, clearly discriminated our bird from its congeners, and described its nest, plumage, and habits. "Like many others of our summer migrants, it is more common on the eastern than on the western side of England; and it seems not to breed in Devon or Cornwall. In the last county, indeed, it is only known with certainty to have occurred as a straggler, and that but once, in the autumn of 1849, when several were taken in Scilly" (Newton's Yarrell, I., p. 370). It does not appear to extend farther towards the north-west than

Derbyshire, but is known at Scarborough, and so high as the East and West Lothians. A straggler or two only have been found in Ireland. It is eminently a bird of the great reed-beds which form so conspicuous a feature in much of the scenery of the eastern counties, and were still more predominant before the drainage operations of the present century.

“O'er the illimitable reed,  
And many a glancing plash and sallowy isle,  
The wide-wing'd sunset of the misty marsh  
Glares” \*

on the little brown bird and its nest. Thus it is often known as the Reed Bird or Reed Wren. It may have been the bird which Keats had in his mind when he wrote—

“The sedge has withered from the lake,  
And no birds sing.”

It is somewhat curious that the Laureate, with his fondness for marshland scenery and life, does not introduce it specially into his poetry. Mariana might well have listened to its song when

“Upon the middle of the night,  
Waking, she heard the night-fowl crow;  
The cock sang out an hour ere light;  
From the dark fen the oxen's low  
Came to her,”

for these are precisely the sounds which Mr. Stevenson, who has given so excellent an account of the Reed Warbler, heard when he spent that summer night on Sulkingham Broad of which he has written so charmingly,† till

“Cold winds woke the grey-eyed morn.”

This bird is occasionally found far from reeds, and even water, in thickets; but both by its song and its nest it loves to identify itself with them. Some who are strangers to the fenland scenery of East Anglia may fancy its reed-beds monotonous both in colour and vegetation. We cannot better describe them for such persons as they are seen in the Broads of Norfolk and form the peculiar haunt of the Reed Warbler than by quoting a description which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* for December, 1879. “On either side of the river and round the Broads is a dense wall of emerald reeds from seven to ten feet in height. Then come the yellow iris flowers, tall and bending rushes and bulrushes, the sweet sedge with its curious

\* “The Last Tournament.”

† See Stevenson's “Birds of Norfolk,” Vol. I., p. 121.

catkins, tangled feathery grasses in such variety that as you stand up to your neck in them you may pluck a dozen kinds without moving, blue clusters of forget-me-nots, foxgloves, spikes of purple loose-strife and broad tufts of valerian, bushes of woody nightshade, and, sweeter than all, masses upon masses all the way along of the cream-white and strong-scented meadow-sweet—these are what make the immediate banks changing panoramas of kaleidoscopic beauty. Then on the water, beneath the reeds, and across shallow bays, and in the little ‘pulks,’ or miniature Broads, which everywhere open off the river, are lilies, yellow and white, in dazzling abundance.” The Reed Warbler is a great songster, and may be heard throughout the day except in windy weather, but is said to delight chiefly in singing through the twilight of a summer night. It frequently indulges in mimicry of other birds’ songs, and its strains are not so interrupted by the harsh twittering which often spoils the effect of the Sedge Warbler’s melody. Perhaps Mr. Tennyson was thinking of the Reed Warbler when he penned the following striking description of the bulbul’s song:—

“The living airs of middle night  
Died round the bulbul as he sung:  
Not he, but something which possessed  
The darkness of the world. Delight,  
Life, anguish, death, immortal love,  
Ceasing not, mingled, unrepressed.”

He who would hear this bird must visit the following counties:—Essex, Surrey, Kent, Suffolk, and especially Norfolk. It is common on the banks of the Thames between Erith and Greenwich, in the reed-beds. Worms, insects, and fresh-water molluscs form its food. In these watery districts then the searcher may look out for a brown bird in its upper plumage, with a white throat and under plumage of a yellowish-white. It has no yellowish-white streak over the eye, as has the Sedge Warbler, neither is it so small as that bird. Both birds, however, are noticeable from the rounded form of their tails, of which the outer feathers are shorter than those in the centre. Besides these two birds, the Grasshopper Warbler and Savi’s Warbler (the latter very scarce in England) make up the genus *Salicaria*, distinguished by its rounded tail, as has been said, and its partiality for watery situations. A single specimen of a fifth member of the family, the Great Sedge Warbler (*S. turdoides*), has been shot near Durham. This is the largest of the European Warblers, being eight inches in length. We can promise the intruder upon the watery domains where the Reed Warbler is found, a feast of beauty, if his eyes have been purged with the euphrasie which will enable him to

see it. We have already quoted a prose account of these singular localities; Lowell furnishes an excellent companion picture in verse—

“Dear marshes! vain to him the gift of sight  
Who cannot in their various incomes share,  
From every season drawn, of shade and light,  
Who sees in them but levels brown and bare;  
Each change of storm or sunshine scatters free  
On them its largess of variety,  
For Nature with cheap means still works her wonders rare.

“All round, upon the river's slippery edge,  
Witching to deeper calm the drowsy tide,  
Whispers and leans the breeze-entangling sedge;  
Through emerald glooms the lingering waters slide,  
Or, sometimes wavering, throw back the sun,  
And the stiff banks in eddies melt and run  
Of dimpling lights, and with the current seem to glide.” \*

There is the nest of the bird to be seen, and what a marvel of beauty and constructive ingenuity is it! It may be compared advantageously in both respects with the nest of the Pensile Grosbeak (*Loxia pensilis*), an African nest-weaving bird. Our bird interweaves its nest between the stems of two, three, four, or sometimes as many as five reeds, with the seed-branches of the reeds and grass, mixed with a little wool, all wound round and together so as to be supported at the same height, however much wind may shake the reeds. It measures five inches in depth outside, and is often three inches deep inside, so that when the reeds are waving in the wind the eggs do not roll out, and the bird has been seen sitting safely on them when almost every gust forced it to the surface of the water. Indeed the nest is so strongly interwoven and compacted that it may be carried away intact, if the reeds which uphold it are cut below, and be preserved as a beautiful specimen of bird architecture. When the nest thus sways in the wind, the old bird is careful to fix her claws firmly into its sides, and then keeping her head towards the wind, swings perfectly secure. The eggs are dull greenish-white, speckled with olive and light brown, and are four or five in number. The young soon quit the nest after being hatched, and by means of their sharp claws cling with much facility to the reeds. The cuckoo frequently lays her egg in a Reed Warbler's nest. Mr. Thomas relates a curious scene which he once beheld, when a young cuckoo, having settled on a rail, was being fed by its foster-mother, a Reed Warbler:—“The difference in the size of the two birds was great; it was

\* “An Indian Summer Reverie.”





like a pigmy feeding a giant. When the Reed Warbler was absent, the cuckoo shuffled along the rail, and hopped upon a slender post to which it was nailed, and which projected about eight inches above the rail. The Reed Warbler soon returned with more food, and alighted close to the cuckoo, but on the rail beneath him; she then began to stretch herself to the utmost to give him the food, but was unable to reach the cuckoo's mouth, who, like a simpleton, threw his head back, with his mouth wide open, as before. The Reed Warbler, by no means at a loss, perched upon the cuckoo's broad back, who, still holding back his head, received in this singular way the morsel brought for him." \*

The Reed Warbler is found in South Sweden, and in Denmark, Germany, and Southern Russia; in short, wherever on the Continent suitable localities tempt it. It is known in Asia Minor, and is very common in the Holy Land, where Dr. Tristram fancied it was an early spring migrant.

Just as the bird itself is not invariably found near reeds and water, so its nest is occasionally placed in a different locality. Thus it has been taken from the low part of a poplar-tree, and from a hazel-bush. In such situations the plan of the nest is somewhat modified, but the bird is always fond of wrapping it round with long grass, or with what wool, yarn, string, and the like, she can procure. The Reed Warbler has been kept in confinement, and was then heard to sing at intervals through the winter, as if it were in its favourite spots .

"Where winds with reeds and osiers whispering play."

The Sedge Warbler (*S. phragmitis*) keeps up more of a chatter than a song in such places, and especially in the bushes and thickets which fringe a river. It is a great mimic, and, like the Reed Warbler, often sings far into the night, keeping up a perpetual fluttering from twig to twig, and seldom being seen quiet for long together. It is connected in our mind with marshy thickets and balmy summer evenings, when the reeds wave in the refreshing breeze—a time and a scene so well painted by Mr. Jefferies:—"Hush! it is the rustle of the reeds. Their heads are swaying, a reddish-brown now, later on in the year a delicate feathery white. Seen from beneath, their slender tips, as they gracefully sweep to and fro, seem to trace designs upon the blue dome of the sky. A whispering in the reeds and tall grasses, a faint murmuring of the waters; yonder, across the broad water-meadow, a yellow haze hiding the elms."† If the bustling chatterer within his leafy recesses is silent for a minute or two, a stone or clod hurled in will

\* See Johns' "British Birds," p. 120.

† "Wild Life in a Southern County," p. 243.

at once cause him to resume his varied chirping. His nest is probably close at hand, about a foot from the ground, at no great distance from the water, composed of dead grass, moss, and fine roots, and lined with hair, wool, and feathers. The five or six eggs within are of a dull brown or dirty white hue. Like the Reed Warbler, it comes in April and leaves again in September. To Pennant and White of Selborne belongs the credit of having discovered this species in England.

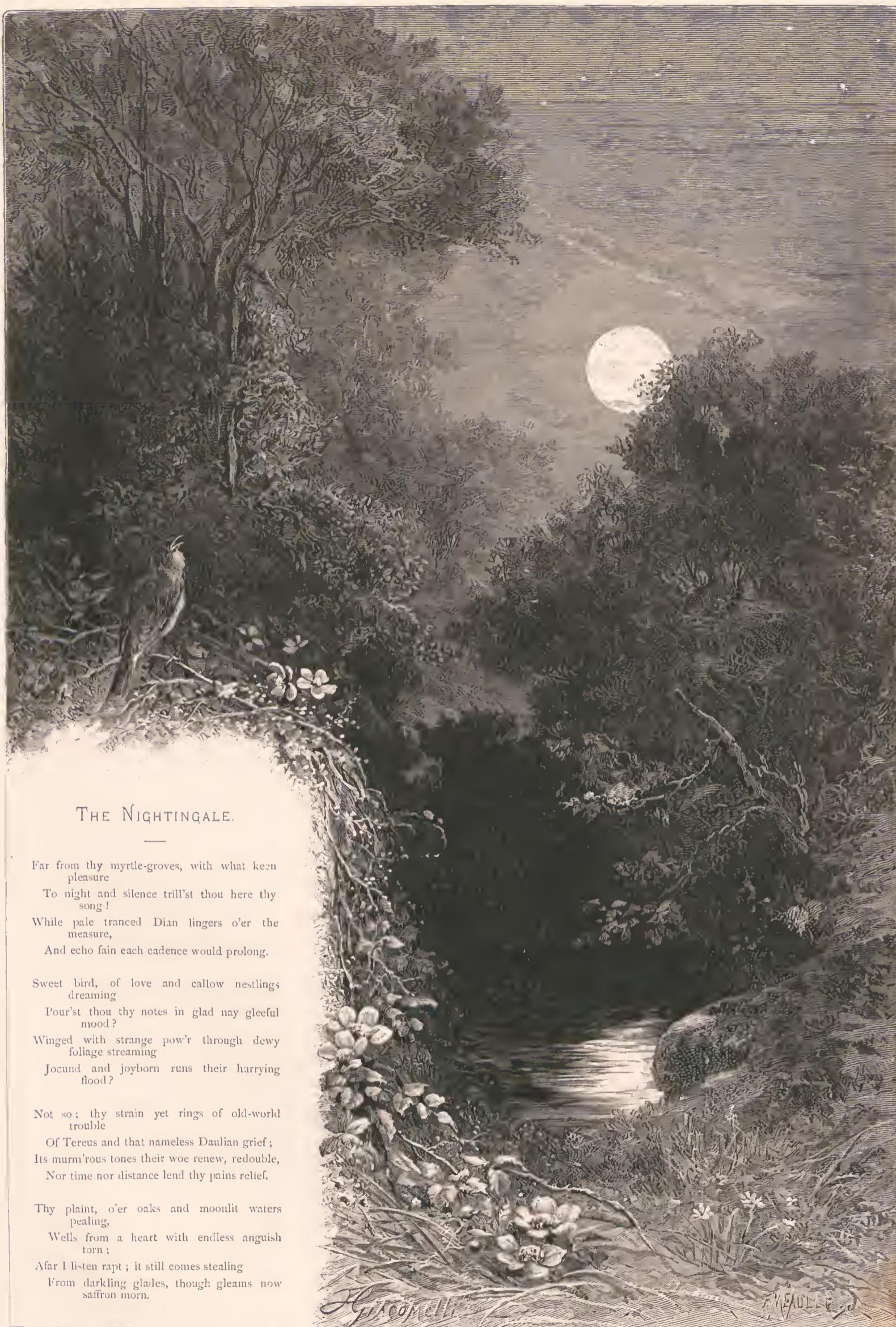
Yet another of the family, the Grasshopper Warbler (*S. locustella*), may be expected in precisely the same situations as these two birds. It, too, is an immigrant of April, retiring in September. It is more shy than the others, secreting itself in the thickest coverts of its fastnesses and creeping about among the stems of the herbage and reeds, "more like a mouse than a bird," says Professor Newton. Its chirping monotonous sounds are very characteristic when once recognised, and resemble nothing so much as the constant "click, click" of a fisherman's reel; hence the bird is sometimes known provincially as the "reeler." This chatter is very common in the evening, and has been called "ventriloquistic," as it seems to proceed from all parts of the thicket where the bird is concealed. It is a small greenish-brown, dusky creature, with a long tail, and its enrolment amongst British birds is again due to the patient observations of White. The nest is as difficult to discover as the bird, and very few ornithologists have ever succeeded in finding one. It is said to be cup-shaped, about four inches across over the top, formed externally of coarse grass and sedges mixed with moss, and lined within with fine bents. It lays from five to seven eggs, of a reddish-white, closely spotted with a darker red. The Grasshopper Warbler is not uncommon in every county of England, and reaches far up into the west coast of Scotland. It does not cross the Baltic, but is found frequently in Germany. Any one with the least pretension to ornithology should be able to distinguish these three birds of the marshes by their song alone—the Reed Warbler, the Sedge Warbler, and the Grasshopper Warbler.

Broderip rightly applies the epithet "merry" to the song of the Reed Warbler, "for merry he is, notwithstanding his pale brown Quakerly suit." His description of its song agrees with that of most ornithologists. "The song is varied and pleasing, though hurried, like that of the Sedge Warbler, and is of better quality. Frequently have we heard it when plying the rod on the banks of the Colne. It sings by night as well as by day continually, and its loud music, often heard clearest in the evening twilight or grey dawn, resembles the notes and voices of several different birds." Barrington, however, did not highly regard its song, perhaps owing to his dissociating it from the watery localities which the bird loves, and viewing

it merely as a bird's song in the abstract. He constructed a curious table of the comparative merit of our singing birds, making twenty the point of perfection, and assigning so many marks to each bird respectively for its mellowness of note, sprightly notes, plaintive notes, compass, and execution, in a manner worthy of our own age of examinations. Thus the nightingale is credited with a total of ninety marks, or ten less than perfection, the skylark with sixty-three, the robin (of whose song he had evidently a high idea) with fifty-eight. The Reed Warbler, however (or Reed Sparrow, as he terms it), only obtains eight in all! Such an attempt to construct an exact estimate of birds' songs is its own refutation. The writer is swayed by his own predilections, and cannot possibly do justice to all the songsters.

Of course the best mode of hearing and observing the Reed Warbler is by boat, save in exceptional localities. Its slender bill, compact form, and sharp claws are admirably adapted for the reed-beds which it loves. Few writers have better described the habits of this bird and its nice adaptation to the reeds and the conditions of its life than Mudie, with whose remarks the history of the Reed Warbler may fitly conclude:—

"That this bird is not adapted for so many situations as the Sedge Bird" (he means the Sedge Warbler) "might be inferred from the different form of the tail, which is more produced and not wedge-shaped, so that while it answers better as a balance on the bending reeds or other flexible aquatic plants, it would not be so convenient among the unyielding sprays of a hedge or brake. The bird rarely, if ever, perches upon the tops of reeds, even on its first arrival, and when the song of invitation to a mate is given, its place is on a leaf or a leaning stem, though upon an emergency it can cling to an upright one, the stiff feathers of the tail acting as a sort of prop. It is not easily raised, and remains but a very short time upon the wing; but it is by no means timid on its perch, upon which, if it be very flexible, it sits with its wings not quite closed, but recovered, so as to have a little hold on the air, and thereby either prevent its fall or be ready when a gust comes to bear it to a more secure footing. Its food is found wholly over the stagnant waters. The Reed Warbler does not come until the reeds are considerably advanced, and it departs before they are cut, so that it dwells in peace; and, especially in the mornings about the end of May or beginning of June, it may be observed with the greatest ease."



### THE NIGHTINGALE.

Far from thy myrtle-groves, with what keen pleasure

To night and silence trill'st thou here thy song !

While pale tranced Dian lingers o'er the measure,

And echo faint each cadence would prolong.

Sweet bird, of love and callow nestling dreams

Pour'st thou thy notes in glad nay gleeful mood ?

Winged with strange pow'r through dewy foliage streaming

Jocund and joyborn runs their harrying flood ?

Not so ; thy strain yet rings of old-world trouble

Of Tereus and that nameless Daulian grief ;  
Its murmur'rous tones their woe renew, redouble,  
Nor time nor distance lend thy pains relief.

Thy plaint, o'er oaks and moonlit waters pealing,

Wells from a heart with endless anguish torn ;

Afar I listen rapt ; it still comes stealing

From darkling glades, though gleams now saffron morn.

H. C. Comelli

F. M. Neale



## THE NIGHTINGALE.

(*Philomela luscinia*, L.)



HIS is the most famous of the warblers (*Sylviadæ*), its song being celebrated both in ancient and modern poetry. Few birds possess a more splendid reputation, and few have a plainer dress. The Nightingale is rich brown above, with a reddish tinge on the tail; the under parts are greyish-white, the bill and legs light brown. The bird is six and a quarter inches long. Both sexes have the same plumage, and might be passed over unnoticed amongst the tenants of copse and hedgerow by a careless eye. But the soul that has least music in its composition is immediately arrested when the Nightingale sings, especially if a tranquil, balmy night lends additional charms to the melody. The rapture, sweetness, and force of the strain is marvellous. We have listened for an hour at a time to the bird pouring forth burst after burst without intermission a few yards over our head, yet perfectly hid among the foliage, utterly indifferent to any one's presence, possessed, as the ancients would have said, by a spirit of song. On reaching home, a mile away, in the grey dawn of the brief summer's night, the bird's song could still be heard, pealing forth strongly passage after passage of curiously intricate melody. It is a migratory bird, singularly averse to cold or to prolonged flights. For this reason it has been supposed that the Nightingale only crosses the Channel in spring at its narrowed part, the Straits of Dover, and then spreads out in the direction of a fan towards east, north, and west. The theory at all events corresponds well enough with the

ordinary distribution of the bird in England. It is thus all but unknown in Cornwall and Devon, though the latter county especially seems eminently fitted for it, and wholly unknown in Ireland. It is local and rare in North Somerset, found plentifully on the Wye near Tintern, and more rarely through Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, to about five miles north of York. In Lincolnshire it is local, though some have thought that each year of late it has penetrated to more northern districts. The Oxford and Cambridge college gardens are famed for this bird, and Norwich is a very city of Nightingales. In Scotland it is unknown, and an attempt to introduce it into Caithness by Sir J. Sinclair, who placed Nightingales' eggs sent to him from London in robins' nests, proved an utter failure. The Nightingales were, indeed, hatched, but in September they flew off never to return.

On the Continent it occurs in Austria and as far north as Funen. In Greece it is as common as of old. It is found, too, in Arabia and Egypt, and breeds in the valley of the Jordan. With us it arrives, according to White and Markwick's calendar, and begins to sing in April. The bird-catchers take a great many of the males (which arrive some ten or fourteen days before the females), but multitudes of these birds speedily die. Copses, thick bushy plantations near water, and the like are favourite localities of the Nightingale. It is said, too, that this bird is fond of a place with an echo. From pairing-time to the hatching of the young the male bird sings his best, day and night. The nest is loosely constructed of dead leaves, bents, and the like, and is placed on or near the ground. The eggs are five or six in number, olive-brown in colour, sometimes passing into red. The food of the bird consists of insects, especially meal-worms, and berries. The male birds cease their serenades when they have to supply the little ones, and then White notices of them:—"Nightingales, when their young first come abroad and are helpless, make a plaintive and a jarring noise, and also a snapping or cracking, pursuing people along the hedges as they walk. These last sounds seem intended for menace and defiance." Towards the end of August the Nightingale leaves us again for his winter abodes in the East.

Almost all the interest connected with the Nightingale centres in its song. Jesse points to it as a special instance of the power of emulation in causing birds to sing, especially at pairing-time. "At such time two Nightingales may be heard pouring forth their delightful notes, both day and night, near each other. When a female arrives a contest takes place for her, and when her choice has been made, the rejected bird quits the locality and resumes its song in some other quarter." The bulbul is a near relative of the Nightingale, and sings beautifully, but is, perhaps,

more celebrated amongst the natives of the Carnatic for its fighting qualities. It is held on the finger, attached to it by a string, and fights with great pertinacity. Matthew Arnold exactly points out the time and place when the Nightingale may be best heard—

“With a free onward impulse brushing through,  
By night, the silvered branches of the glade—  
Far on the forest-skirts, where none pursue,  
On some mild pastoral slope  
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales,  
Freshen thy flowers, as in former years,  
With dew, or listen with enchanted ears  
From the dark dingles to the Nightingales !”

What that song is has been described by a multitude of poets in every term of praise permitted by the language. A list of 178 adjectives applied as epithets to this bird has been published, and probably a diligent student of poetry could add many more to them. A most excellent prose imitation was composed by Bechstein, upon a type of Bettini's, a Jesuit who lived more than two hundred years ago. It will be found in a book easily accessible to most people, Chambers' “Book of Days,” Vol. I., p. 516. But no one has written so beautifully of the bird as Izaak Walton, who is popularly celebrated for quite another craft than authorship:—“The Nightingale, another of my airy creatures, breathes such sweet loud music out of her little instrumental throat, that it might make mankind to think miracles are not ceased. He that at midnight, when the very labourer sleeps securely, should hear, as I have very often, the clear airs, the sweet descants, the natural rising and falling, the doubling and redoubling of her voice, might well be lifted above earth and say, ‘Lord, what music hast Thou provided for the saints in Heaven when Thou affordest bad men such music on earth!’” For a scientific criticism of its melody perhaps the following words recently published by Mr. Sully may suffice:—“It is a noteworthy feature of bird-song that for the most part it does not wander freely from note to note, but confines itself to certain fixed groups of notes, which may be called elementary themes or motives. The song of the lark illustrates the absence of such recurring phrases; the song of the robin, the chaffinch, the thrush, the Nightingale, and a host of others is marked by their presence. A bird's rank in the feathered orchestra may be determined by the number and beauty of these recurring phrases. Measured in this way, the Nightingale is *facile princeps* among the visitants of our climate, though it is disputed whether the American mockingbird is not superior by reason of its richer *répertoire* of subjects.”

Much of the folk-lore that gathered round the Nightingale in classical poetry, and still furnishes it with poetical epithets, names, and imagery, comes from the myth that Philomela and Progne, daughters of Pandion, King of Athens, were changed respectively into a Nightingale and a swallow. As this happened at Daulis, the former is often called the Daulian and, again, the Attic bird. Pliny says that it sings on its first arrival for fifteen days and nights without intermission, and when conquered in song often dies from vexation. One sang in the mouth of Stesichorus when an infant, he goes on to assert, typifying the sweetness of his future lyrics. With a remembrance of this legend Lord Byron said that a Nightingale sang in the room in which Moore was born. Pliny, like Bechstein, in an exquisite passage, happily hits off the varied yet harmonious song of the Nightingale. It is often asserted amongst our poets, and believed by rustics, that the Nightingale builds its nest with a thorn to penetrate it and prick the bird's breast. In France a still prettier myth makes the male bird lean upon a thorn as it sings, and thus bewail its own sufferings. The Nightingale was associated in English folk-lore with the robin for the kind services both were supposed to render to the dead. Thus Herrick says—

“ When I departed am, ring thou my bell,  
Thou pitiful and pretty Philomel;  
And when I'm laid out for a corse, then be  
Thou sexton, redbreast, for to cover me;”

and another old writer makes “the robin waite in his redde livorie on the Nightingale, who sits as a crowner on the murthred man, and plays the sorrie tailour to make him a mossy rayment.”

No bird is so universal a favourite among our poets as the Nightingale. Among all their descriptions of its melody, all their delight in its song, Keats' “Ode to a Nightingale” is unsurpassed in feeling and beauty. Chaucer, who was as fond of singing birds as of May month and wild flowers, speaks of

“ The Nightingale,  
That clepith forthe the freshè levis newe;”

and adds it to a picture of spring—

“ Then doth the Nightingale her might  
To makin noise and singen blithe.”

Thomson, again, depicts the Nightingale's woe in words as tender as they are true to nature, although due to a classical prototype—

“ But let not chief the Nightingale lament  
Her ruin'd care, too delicately framed





To brook the harsh confinement of the cage.  
 Oft when returning with a loaded bill  
 Th' astonished mother finds a vacant nest,  
 By the hard hand of unrelenting clowns  
 Robbed. To the ground the vain provision falls;  
 Her pinions ruffle, and, low drooping, scarce  
 Can bear the mourner to the poplar shade,  
 Where, all abandoned to despair, she sings  
 Her sorrows through the night, and on the bough  
 Sole-sitting, still at every dying fall  
 Takes up again her lamentable strain  
 Of winding woe, till wide around the woods  
 Sigh to her song, and with her wail resound."

*Spring.*

Among modern poets, Coleridge and Tennyson ("The Vision of Sin") have dwelt upon the Nightingale's rapturous song. The latter has a novel image in "Enoch Arden" well worthy of quotation—

"Where a passion, yet unborn, perhaps,  
 Lay hidden, as the music of the moon  
 Sleeps in the plain eggs of the Nightingale."

Throughout all modern poetry two distinct views are taken of the Nightingale's song—one that it is a merry, joyous strain; the other that it is a mournful melody. Partly their own idiosyncrasy, partly the fables of the ancients, have coloured men's minds herein. Milton, as might be expected, generally deems it a sad song. The Nightingale was his favourite bird, singing, like himself, in darkness, and "nightly singing her sad song well." A wonderful collection of poetic imagery may be made from the passages in which he dwells upon this bird, many of which are of unrivalled sweetness and execution, and will give the reader some idea of his learning and the prodigality of his poetic genius. The lark seems to have been Shakespeare's favourite bird, and a theorist may easily see in this preference the character both of his temperament and his poetry. But we may be sure that as a Warwickshire man he has not omitted the Nightingale from the long list of rustic birds and objects which appear in the plays. Juliet thus pleads with her lover—

"It was the Nightingale, and not the lark,  
 That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.  
 Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree.  
 Believe me, love, it was the Nightingale!"

and another lover says—

"Except I be by Sylvia in the night,  
 There is no music in the Nightingale."

We hear, too, of "the Nightingale's complaining woes," and of "twenty caged Nightingales," showing that the cruelties practised on this bird by the snarers are not of recent infliction. But Shakespeare can upon occasion hear the merry, gleeful mood in this bird's character, as in—

"Philomel with melody  
Sing in our sweet lullaby ;"

and in

"She sings as sweetly as any Nightingale."

The bird's name and its suggestiveness probably caused him to put into Edgar's mouth in "King Lear" that "the foul fiend haunts poor Tom in the shape of a Nightingale." Almost every one, when disputing whether the bird's song is glad or mournful, has been confronted with the objection that much of the sweetness and effectiveness of the strain is due to its association with the peaceful images of night. Shakespeare long ago put this view in the mouth of Portia—

"And I think  
The Nightingale, if she should sing by day,  
When every goose is caekling, would be thought  
No better a musician than the wren."

There is a legend in Essex that Nightingales never sing at St. Oswy whole, because they interrupted Becket's evening prayers by their song, and were cursed by the saint for their ill-timed merriment.

The love of the Nightingale for the rose forms the theme of much Persian poetry. Sir William Jones thus translates a Persian quatrain—

"Come, charming maid, and hear thy poet sing,  
Thyself the rose, and he the bird of spring ;  
Love bids him sing, and Love will be obeyed,  
Be gay ! Too soon the flowers of spring will fade ;"

and Byron, in a beautiful description of the rose as known only in all its fragrance in the East, has not forgotten the myth—

"For there the rose o'er crag or vale,  
Sultana of the Nightingale,  
The maid for whom his melody,  
His thousand songs, are heard on high,  
Blooms blushing to her lover's tale.  
His queen, the garden queen, his rose,  
Unbent by winds, unchilled by snows,

Far from the winters of the west,  
By every breeze and season blest,  
Returns the sweets by nature given  
In softest incense back to heaven."

*The Giaour.*

It is cruel to continue the quotation, seeing under what atmospheric difficulties the rosarians of the West cultivate their favourite flower, many of them uncheered by any Nightingale songs. Of two lovers the same poet, following herein Shakespeare, writes—

"They should have lived together deep in woods,  
Unseen as sings the Nightingale; they were  
Unfit to mix in these thick solitudes  
Called social."

And again—

"There was no reason for their loves  
More than for those of Nightingales or doves."

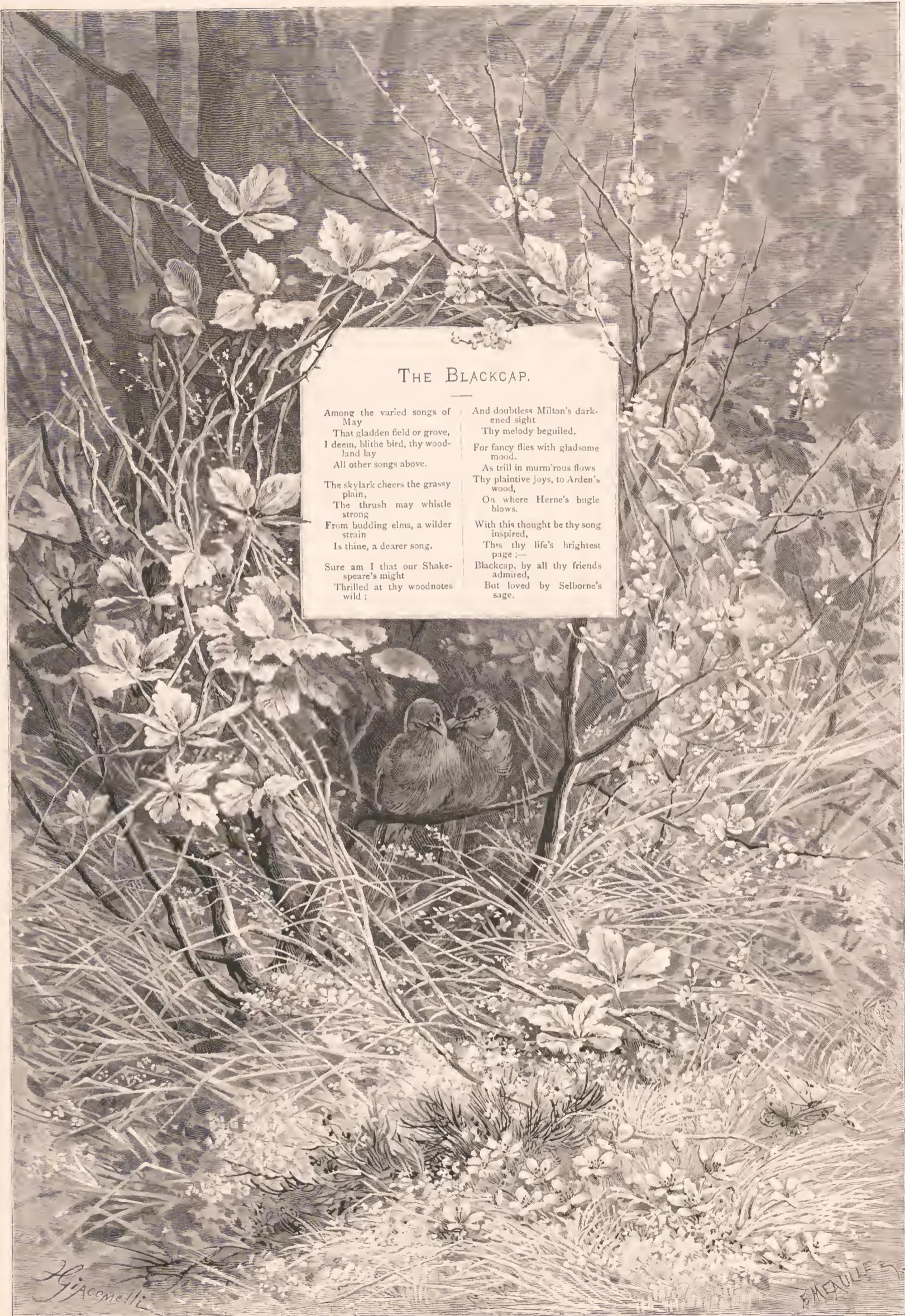
A delightful legend to account for the sadness and nocturnal singing of the Nightingale exists in the Val Ste. Veronique. "Long ago it used to sing like other birds in the day-time; but once in a warm night of May one fell asleep on a rapidly growing vine. The tendrils of this grew very fast, and twined about its slender legs as it slept, so that when morn broke it could not escape, and its mates came to compassionate its woe. At length it died, and they were so impressed by its sad end that they dared no longer to sleep at night, but watched in fear, and sung to keep each other awake. Even yet they utter the same notes of warning, and what they say is this: 'La vigne pousse—pousse—pousse, vite, vite, vite, vite, vite, vite, vite!' pronouncing 'pousse,' &c., slowly and in soft cadences, 'vite' higher and higher till it finishes in a rapid presto."—(P. G. Hamerton in the *Portfolio*, 1874, p. 159).

But of all the poetic descriptions of the Nightingale's song none expresses its hopeful side, and contrasts with it that prophetic insight which is inseparable from all true human poetry better than the Laureate—

"And the Nightingale thought, 'I have sung many songs,  
But never a one so gay,  
For he sings of what the world will be  
When the years have died away!'"

*The Poet's Song.*





### THE BLACKCAP.

Among the varied songs of  
May  
That gladden field or grove,  
I deem, blithe bird, thy wood-  
land lay  
All other songs above.  
  
The skylark cheers the grassy  
plain,  
The thrush may whistle  
strong  
From budding elms, a wilder  
strain  
Is thine, a dearer song.  
  
Sure am I that our Shake-  
speare's might  
Thrilled at thy woodnotes  
wild;

And doubtless Milton's dark-  
ened sight  
Thy melody beguiled.  
For fancy flies with gladsome  
mood,  
As trill in murmur'rous flows  
Thy plaintive joys, to Arden's  
wood,  
On where Herne's bugle  
blows.  
  
With this thought be thy song  
inspired,  
Thus thy life's brightest  
page :—  
Blackcap, by all thy friends  
admired,  
But loved by Selborne's  
sage.

Giacomelli

EMBOULE



## THE BLACKCAP.

(*Sylvia atricapilla*, L.)

**T**HE Blackcap is a well-known member of the *Sylviadæ*, celebrated chiefly for its song. The birds forming this great family are generally of a delicate type, with an awl-shaped bill, but there are several aberrant forms. This one is known in Norfolk as the Mock Nightingale, and like that bird it sings far into the night. Bechstein says that the Blackcap rivals, and in the opinion of some surpasses, the nightingale's song. "If," he adds, "it has less volume, strength, and expression, it is more pure, easy, and flutelike in its tones, and its song is perhaps more varied, smooth, and delicate." It is a migratory bird; "in April, in the very first fine weather they come trooping, all at once, into these parts, but are never seen in winter. They are delicate songsters," writes White, with whom the bird was a special favourite. "Its note," again he says, "has such a wild sweetness, that it always brings to my mind those lines in a song in 'As You Like It'—

'And tune his merry note  
Unto the sweet bird's throat.'"

And no one has better characterised its song than he has done in another passage. "The Blackcap has in common a full, sweet, deep, loud and wild pipe; yet that strain is of short continuance, and his motions are desultory; but when that bird sits calmly and engages in song in earnest, he pours forth very sweet, but inward melody, and expresses great variety of soft and gentle modulations, superior perhaps

to those of any of our warblers, the nightingale excepted. Blackcaps mostly haunt gardens and orchards; while they warble, their throats are wonderfully distended."

The Blackcap is five inches and a half in length. The top and back of the head is jet-black in the male, but reddish or chocolate colour in the female; the upper plumage, wings, and tail are ash-grey, shading into olive; the under plumage is a lighter grey. The female is larger than the male, and the young birds have not so conspicuous a hood as she has. Occasionally the Blackcap spends the winter in the British Islands; and (says Professor Newton) "it would, singularly enough, seem that in winter some, if not all of the males, lose their black caps, and have their heads coloured like those of the females." About the middle of April, but never till the larches are green, "the pilgrim gray with sable head" appears in his favourite haunts. White gives 26th March to 4th May as the times within which he is first heard. And he departs before the middle of September, when so many of his family also leave our shores. The males seem to arrive, as does the nightingale, before the females, and they are at first timid and shy, seeking to conceal themselves. It has then the trick of practising its song in a low tone, "recording" as the bird-fanciers call it, a habit which often leads to its capture. After a few days it obtains its full powers of song. It is said, like many other powerful songsters, to be a mimic, or "polyglot," as White quaintly termed it, at times. Another curious trait in its history is that it shares with its mate the duties of incubation, and is then very fearless, but not so much as the hen-bird, who will not mind an observer coming quite close to her. Its food consists of insects, berries, and fruit, especially ivy-berries, raspberries, and red currants. Sweet says, "When it first arrives in this country its chief food is the early-ripened berries of the ivy, and where these are there the Blackcaps are first to be heard singing their melodious and varied song. By the time the ivy-berries are over, the little green larvæ of the small moths will be getting plentiful, rolled up in the young shoots and leaves; this then is their chief food until the strawberries and cherries become ripe; after that there is no want of fruit or berries till their return, and there is no sort of fruit or berry that is eatable or wholesome that they will refuse. After they have cleared the elder-berries in autumn, they immediately leave us."

This bird visits and breeds in all our counties. It is local, but not scarce in Ireland, while in Scotland it may be called rare, though its nest has been found in the south, and the bird itself has occurred so far north as Caithness and the Orkneys. It visits also every country of Europe, though scarce in Sweden and Norway. It breeds in the Holy Land, and is a bird of passage in Egypt, Nubia,

Abyssinia, and along the Red Sea, coming from the south in February and March. Bishop Mant gives a very faithful sketch of the Blackcap's life in England in the following pretty lines :—

" Mid the fruit-trees' blooming bowers,  
Where now the warm prolific hours  
Tempt him the ivy buds to quit,  
And through the flowery orchard flit  
Or garden, for his filmy prey,  
Enlivened by the sunny ray,—  
The Blackcap see! And now with trill  
Of wild note from his mellow bill  
He cheers, and now with gnat or fly  
Caught sporting in the azure sky,  
Attent his brooding consort feeds:  
And, as the nestling task proceeds,  
Oft may you mark his sable crown  
Exchanged for hers of russet brown."

The nest is usually placed in a hedge or low bush a few feet above the ground, and is built of bents and dry herbage, with a lining of fine roots and hair. The eggs are five or six in number, and differ greatly in colour, usually falling under one of two types. They are either pale greenish-white variously mottled with several shades of brown, or are of a light red or pale crimson hue mottled with darker reddish-brown or purple. The Blackcap is a favourite cage-bird, not merely from its song, but from the friendly disposition it shows. On the Continent a still worse fate too often befalls it. It is killed as a *beccafico*, or fig-eater; all fruit-eating birds, when fat and in good condition for the table, coming under this appellation in Italy. A very old article of folk-lore both with Aristotle and Pliny was that beccaficoes and Blackcaps change into each other. "The bird is a beccafico," they say, "at the beginning of autumn, and a Blackcap when it ends." The true beccafico is said to be the *Sylvia hortensis*, Garden Warbler, a near relative of the Blackcap's, and of much the same retiring habits. It is also a well-known English spring visitor. Jesse speaks of the "love-laboured" song of the Blackcap before it pairs; afterwards its voice is not heard so frequently or so loudly. Mr. Dixon ("Bird Life," p. 100) has recently drawn from nature a capital picture of the Blackcap. After impressing upon the observer the need of cautious approach, he continues:—"You find he sings as he wanders over the branches in his search for insects, or remains stationary for minutes together, engaged in pouring forth his notes, his little throat quivering, his head turning from side to side, as if conscious of your presence, and his jet-black plumage contrasting richly with the golden greens of the vernal vegetation around. And then

how beautifully this little creature modulates his music! We hear a soft plaintive note, sounding as though its author were a hundred yards away. Gradually it rises in its tone; we think the bird is coming nearer. Louder and louder become the notes, till they sound as if a blackbird, song-thrush, wren, robin, and warbler were all singing together. We happen to cast our eyes in the branches above us, and there we see this little black-capped songster; and after watching him we find that all these lovely notes, low and soft, loud and full, come from his little throat alone, and when at the same distance from us."

Thus much, then, for the life and characteristics of the Blackcap. It has not been so much celebrated in poetry as it deserves. It may have been the songster in the Laureate's mind in his welcome to the Princess of Wales—

"Break, happy land, into earlier flowers;  
Make music, O bird, in the new-budded bowers;"

and Thomson, when celebrating the songs of spring, and assigning as their cause

"'Tis love creates their melody, and all  
This waste of music is the voice of love,"

does not specify one of the most delightful minstrels. He relates, indeed, how

"The thrush  
And woodlark, o'er the kind-contending throng  
Superior heard, run through the sweetest length  
Of notes,"

but the Blackcap must be mentally included in the next group—

"Joined to these,  
Innumerable songsters in the fresh'ning shade  
Of new-sprung leaves their modulations mix  
Mellifluous."

Jean Ingelow, however, gives us a pretty picture of spring—

"The Blackcaps in an orchard met  
Praising the berries while they ate;  
The finch that flew her beak to whet  
Before she joined them on the tree;  
The water-mouse among the reeds,  
His bright eyes glancing, black as beads,  
So happy with a bunch of seeds—  
I felt their gladness heartily."

Probably from its shy nature, being more like "a wandering voice" than a bird which can be seen by every one, the Blackcap is not famous in folk-lore. The old





belief of its change into a different bird is akin to the notion prevalent among many rustics at present that the cuckoo turns into a hawk.

The other birds belonging to the same family which visit our shores are the Orphean Warbler and the Rufous Warbler. Two specimens only of each of these, however, have been procured in the British Isles. The Garden Warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*), the Whitethroat (*S. cinerea*), and the Lesser Whitethroat (*S. sylviella*) are common enough to merit a short description. They are all, like the Blackcap, immigrants here in early spring. The first, the Garden Warbler, is greyish-brown, slightly tinged with olive in the upper plumage; there is a patch of ash-grey below the ear, and the under plumage is dull white. Its nest, eggs, and song are so like those of the Blackcap that it is difficult to discriminate between them. Thus Mr. Johns says that the Blackcap possibly obtains credit for some of the sweet strains of the Garden Warbler, especially in late summer. It frequently sings after sunset, and Montagu describes its song as containing some notes "which are sweetly and softly drawn, others quick, lively, loud, and piercing, reaching the distant ear with piercing harmony, something like the whistle of the blackbird, but in a more hurried cadence." Selby remarks that it is not till the elm and oak are bursting into leaf that it is generally seen. Its food is similar to that of the Blackcap, and it is very fond of the caterpillar of the common cabbage butterfly, being the only warbler which will touch this destructive creature. It occurs generally throughout England, and appears to reach Banffshire in Scotland; in Ireland it is extremely rare. Through most of Europe it is found, and it breeds high up in Norway.

The Whitethroat, or Greater Whitethroat, is found in most parts of the Continent, and is a regular summer visitant here, arriving about the third week in April. Its upper plumage is ash and grey, strongly tinged with rust-colour; the wings are blackish, and breast and under plumage white, tinged with rose-colour. The length of the bird is five and a half inches. It is, perhaps, the most common of the migratory warblers, and is generally diffused, but scarce in the north of Scotland. It is fond of the low part of hedges and their outside growth, hopping and flitting about with an incessant babbling chatter made up of many rapid short notes. Thus it gains its French name of "*babillarde*." The same people call it, too, "*grisette*," from its grey feathers, and in some of our rural districts it is known as "*nettle-creeper*," from its habit of exploring the outer growth of hedgerows. Here, too, its nest is most frequently found, raised some two or three feet above the grass, in brambles or furze-bushes, constructed of bents and dry stems of herbs. Of the latter

and much horse-hair the lining is composed, but the nest itself is very open and thin at the sides. The eggs are from four to six in number, of a greenish white, suffused with small specks of olive-green or grey and brown. Its food consists of various kinds of insects until the fruit is ripe, when it brings its young brood to the gardens and commits great havoc among raspberries, currants, and cherries. When the male sings it erects the crest on its head, like a Blackcap, puffs out its throat, and jerks its tail, and occasionally sings while on the wing. The plumage of the female is less pure, and the upper parts are more clouded and rust-coloured.

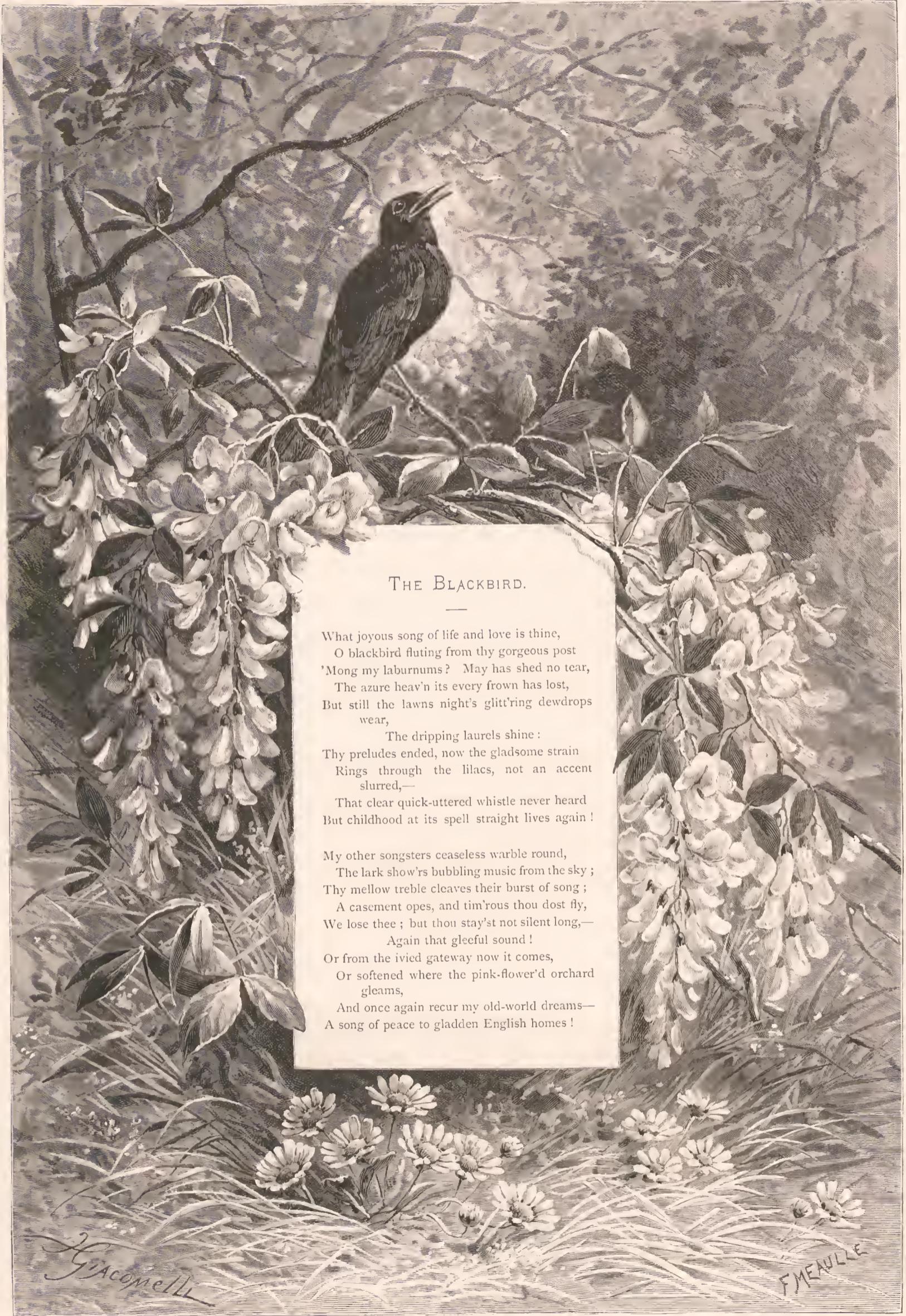
The Lesser Whitethroat was first discovered in this country by Lightfoot. It, too, is a spring migrant, and in most of its habits resembles the previously described species. It is rather smaller than the last, ash-coloured above, tinged with brown; the wings, too, are brown, tail dusky, and lower plumage pure silvery white. It is a regular visitor wherever there are gardens, and a great destroyer of fruit. The female is not quite so large as the male, which has been seen in two instances with a beautiful tinge of pink on the breast. It, too, is common throughout Europe, and is found in the Deccan. It is rare, however, in Scotland and unknown in Ireland. In Germany this bird is known as "*das Mullerchen*" (the little miller), from its clucking tones, which resemble in some degree the monotonous noise of a mill. Professor Newton says this frequent repetition of notes may be syllabled as "sip, sip, sip." In sultry weather they are constantly repeated. In some seasons this bird visits us in greater abundance than at other times. The nest and eggs, together with the position in which the former is placed, much resemble those of the cognate bird. It may be easily reared on being taken from the nest, but in consequence of much of its food consisting of insects, aphides, &c., it is difficult to maintain it in life and health. Like its congeners, it leaves us in September.

The chief points connected with the Blackcap, to sum up what has been said of it, are its extreme shyness and its song. He who would watch it amidst the thick leaves of the haunts it affects has need of much patience and of very sharp eyes. As for its song, almost all authors who know it have written of it in raptures. Thus Broderip ("Zoological Recreations," p. 62) says, "The Blackcap is by common consent acknowledged to excel all the other warblers in the power, beauty, and execution of its notes, excepting the queen of song; and in quality of tone it certainly is, in our opinion, only inferior to the nightingale. But the male is a most sweet singer; nor is the song of the female without attraction; and it is but

fair to state that Bechstein, a very good judge, says that the Blackcap rivals the nightingale, and that many persons even give it the preference. ‘It sings, compared with the nightingale,’ says this writer, ‘for a much longer period both when wild and in confinement, its song being hardly suspended throughout the year by day, and prolonged, like that of the nightingale, far into the night, though begun at dawn.’”

The nest of this bird is occasionally found lined with horse-hair alone, but more frequently with hair, root-fibres, and the like. Broderip speaks feelingly of having seen one in Theodore Hook’s garden at Fulham “suspended in a festoon of ivy which had shot out from the wall, and clung to a neighbouring young tree some seven feet from the ground.” Lower bushes of hawthorn and honeysuckle are generally more to its mind. Many writers dwell on its trustful nature. “The Blackcap,” says one, “is a bird of a most amiable and affectionate temper; not only does he most assiduously share in the labours of the hen bird in a state of freedom, but when taken captive with his family he continues to feed the young ones and the female; even forcing the latter to eat when the misery she experiences from her loss of freedom would lead her to refuse all sustenance. In time he becomes also much attached to the person who takes care of him. He will call his attendant with a particular note, and when he sees him approach his tones become more expressive of affection.” It is said, too, that if Blackcaps are retained in captivity during late autumn, many of them after much restlessness and agitation will die, so strongly do they feel the migratory instinct. Taken all in all, the Blackcap is well worthy of attentive study by all fond of birds; not, however, we would plead, under the unnatural conditions of a cage, which always inflict more or less suffering upon migratory birds, but in the joyous freedom of its life in the orchards and gardens which it loves.





### THE BLACKBIRD.

What joyous song of life and love is thine,  
O blackbird fluting from thy gorgeous post  
'Mong my laburnums? May has shed no tear,  
The azure heav'n its every frown has lost,  
But still the lawns night's glitt'ring dewdrops

wear,

The dripping laurels shine :  
Thy preludes ended, now the gladsome strain  
Rings through the lilacs, not an accent  
slurred,—  
That clear quick-uttered whistle never heard  
But childhood at its spell straight lives again !

My other songsters ceaseless warble round,  
The lark show'rs bubbling music from the sky ;  
Thy mellow treble cleaves their burst of song ;  
A casement opes, and tim'rous thou dost fly,  
We lose thee ; but thou stay'st not silent long,—

Again that gleeful sound !  
Or from the ivied gateway now it comes,  
Or softened where the pink-flower'd orchard  
gleams,  
And once again recur my old-world dreams—  
A song of peace to gladden English homes !

G. A. COMELL

F. MEAULLE



## THE BLACKBIRD.

(*Turdus merula*, L.)



EVERY garden-lover knows but too well, for its pilfering  
and its song,

"The Ousey-cock, so black of hue,  
With orange-tawny bill ;"

and our forefathers, if we may judge by their ballads, associated  
it pleasantly with spring and wooded banks—

"'Tis merry, 'tis merry in good green wood  
When mavis and Merle are singing."

And yet it is a shy bird, seldom seen in flocks, and sufficiently proclaiming its fears by its loud screaming notes when disturbed from the hedgerows and thickets which it is fond of haunting. It is a very early riser, and this same frightened scream is uttered as it leaves the evergreens in the garden during winter, and so awakes the other birds roosting around it. When it appears upon the lawn in search of earthworms, which form a favourite dainty, it is always ready to dart under a bush at a moment's notice, and never cares even in the open fields to venture far from its sheltering hedge or thicket. The luckless worm is pounced upon, pecked, and thrown to the ground, sometimes swallowed in pieces, but oftener whole. The services a pair of Blackbirds thus render to a garden are perhaps not sufficiently weighed against their devastations in the orchard. In winter it may be seen at times in the farmyard searching for scattered grain. The larvæ of insects and snails, however, varied with fruit, especially gooseberries, of which it is exceedingly fond, form the staple of its food during the rest of the

year. Its song is sweet and mellow—more of a whistle than the thrush's warble—and is frequently heard early in a morning of spring, and again at evening, especially during a shower. It continues this song until the ordinary summer moult. When the schoolboy, with his gun, is stealing along a hedgerow in pursuit of rabbits or fieldfares, often does he execrate the noisy alarm of the Blackbird, which at once gives the warning of danger to all animal life near. The true song is not remarkable for much precision or variety, but education will cause the bird to sing several airs without mixing them. It is a mimic, and has been heard to imitate a nightingale as well as a barn-door cock. Pepys in 1663 kept a tame Blackbird, of which he writes:—"May 23rd. Waked this morning between four and five by my Blackbird, which whistled as well as I ever heard any; only it is the beginning of many tunes very well, but then leaves them and goes no further."

The Blackbird is an early builder, and its nest is easily discovered before spring verdure clothes the bushes. A thicket overhanging a pond, or on one of the thicker binders of a hedge, are favourite localities. An evergreen bush is another common situation for the nest. This is formed of coarse roots, twigs, and bents plastered with earth, and is lined with finer bents and roots. We have found one with a couple of yards of coarse string wound round it. The eggs are four or five in number, of a light greenish-blue, mottled with rust-colour. Worms form the food of the young ones, and there are generally two broods, one very early in spring, the second hatched in May. The two sexes differ materially in colour. The male is dressed in sooty black, with the bill and orbits of the eyes orange-yellow; the female is much more rusty in appearance, the upper plumage being uniform umber-brown, while the throat and under parts are orange-brown, with a few dark-coloured spots. The Blackbird is found throughout the year over most parts of Great Britain and Ireland. In the wilder and more hilly parts, however—as, for instance, Dartmoor and Sutherlandshire—its place is filled by the ring-ousel (*T. torquatus*). Partial migrations of Blackbirds undoubtedly take place on the east coast, if not elsewhere through the kingdom. It is said to be only known in Shetland as a winter visitant, while in Northumberland and Norfolk flights have been noticed arriving in November, and flying in a south-western direction. We have seen the hedgerows in a similar manner in north-east Lincolnshire abounding in Blackbirds in autumn, where a few days before and after none would be found. It seems a hardier bird than the thrush, and in our own garden has survived the cold winter of 1878-79, followed by the wet spring of the latter year, better than its relative the thrush. It extends to the Ural Mountains, and is a winter resident in Persia;

breeds, but is not abundant, in Syria and Palestine; and is common from Tunis to Morocco, the Canaries, Madeira, and the Azores.

Mr. Dixon ("Rural Bird Life") furnishes a truthful and pleasant picture of the Blackbird in the garden. "As you wander through the shrubberies, say when the shadows of night are falling, you will often hear a rustling noise under the spreading laurels, amongst the withered leaves. It is the Blackbird, frightened at your approach. If you alarm him still further, he dashes rapidly out, and with loud and startling cries flies off to some safe cover. Conceal yourself under the friendly branches of a yew-tree and wait patiently. You hear their loud startling cries in all directions, and catch occasional glimpses of their dark forms flitting hither and thither in the gloom. 'Pink, pink, pink, tac, tac, tac, tac,' is heard on every side. Now one comes fluttering into the bush under which you are concealed, and his notes startle you by his nearness. A short distance away another answers. Another and another, in different directions, also swell the noisy clamour, and you hear on every side their fluttering wings. Gradually the cries cease in number as the birds settle down to rest; a solitary cry will break the stillness of the evening air, but remain unanswered, and the only sounds that break the oppressive silence are the evening notes of the robin." Occasionally they roost together in winter in great companies among spruce coppices, and the like, these being probably not the birds indigenous to the district, but immigrants. Pied and even albino specimens of Blackbirds are not unknown. The bird itself, though shy for the most part, is at times very bold in defence of its young, and will even intimidate a cat. Its pugnacious propensities in spring must be familiar to all who have studied the habits of lawn-frequenting birds. Jesse relates a curious instance of affection with regard to this bird. "A very young Blackbird was put into a cage which was hung up under the porch of the lodge. After the bird had become reconciled to its confinement, and had begun to feed, an older Blackbird was caught and put into the same cage. This old bird moped and refused to feed itself, and would probably have died, had not the younger brought it food in its bill, and in every respect treated it as if it had been its mother, nourishing it with the greatest perseverance for some time."

The young Blackbird, it may be worth noting, is of a rusty brown colour until it has passed the second autumnal moult. Many caged birds have been known to live to a great age, and it is upon record that a Blackbird has been known to live in confinement for more than twenty years. Its congeners are the song and missel thrushes, the ring-ousel, and those winter immigrants, the fieldfare

and redwing. We cannot find that folk-lore has much concerned itself with the Blackbird. In Meath, however, it is said that "when the Blackbird sings before Christmas, she will cry before Candlemas;" that is, if the Blackbird be silent before Christmas, it foretells an early spring. In poetry our bird has obtained much recognition, chiefly as a herald of spring, though it is noticeable that Shakespeare merely accords it the scant mention we quoted at the beginning of its history. Mr. Harting thinks, too, that when Justice Shallow in "*Henry V.*" asks Justice Silence, "And how doth my cousin?" and the latter answers, "Alas! a black ouzel, cousin Shallow," that this allusion refers to much the same character as we now term, "a black sheep," and points to the Blackbird. Considering, however, that it is the worthy Shallow's "god-daughter, Ellen," who is inquired after, we would fain believe that she is rather commended here as neatly made and black of hair and eyes and shy withal, like a Blackbird. The Blackbird appears in the quaint riddle of the Scotch popular rhymes—

"The Merle and the Blackbird,  
The laverock and the lark,  
The gouldy and the gowd-spink,  
How many birds be that?"

The answer of course being three. Grahame has not forgotten him in a pretty spring picture—

"When snow-drops die and the green primrose-leaves  
Announce the coming flowers, the Merle's note  
Mellifluous, rich, deep-toned, fills all the vale,  
And charms the ravished ear."

The Blackbird serves to intensify the grief of Cowper to mourning for the loss of his poplars—

"The Blackbird has fled to another retreat,  
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat;  
And the scene where his melody charmed me before  
Resounds with his sweet-flowing ditty no more."

One of the earliest birds which a child makes acquaintance with is the Blackbird, if not in nature, at least in the nursery song, "Sing a Song of Sixpence," while multitudes of artists have depicted for him the four-and-twenty Blackbirds baked in a pie. It was a favourite bird, as might be expected from the character of the country round Yarrow and Abbotsford, of both Sir W. Scott and Hogg. That great lover of rural sights and sounds, Izaak Walton, duly celebrates among "those little nimble musicians of the air, that warble forth their curious ditties with which nature





hath furnished them, to the shame of art," the Blackbird, which "with melodious voice bids welcome to the cheerful spring, and in its fixed months warbles forth such ditties as no art or instrument can reach to."

To return, however, from poetical prose to that true poet, Thomson, how well has he seized upon the characteristics of the Blackbird's spring song in the line—

"The Blackbird whistles from the thorny brake."

Another close observer of nature, Wordsworth, fitly enough writes of it—

"The Blackbird among leafy trees,  
The lark above the hill,  
Let loose their carols when they please,  
Are quiet when they will."

But it has fullest justice done to its garden-loving habits by the Laureate. Thus he makes Francis, in "Audley Court," laugh—

"While the Blackbird on the pippin hung  
To hear him ;"

and devotes a whole poem to show how—

"Tho' I spared thee all the spring,  
Thy sole delight is sitting still,  
With that gold dagger of thy bill,  
To fret the summer jenneting."

The wholesome moral succeeds—

"Take warning ! He that will not sing  
While yon sun prospers in the blue  
Shall sing for want ere leaves are new,  
Caught in the frozen palms of spring."

Pied and albino Blackbirds have been alluded to as curious freaks of nature. If any one should desire to manufacture such a bird, we present him with what is said to be an infallible receipt to enable him to do so. It comes from a scarce and diminutive volume of 1652, Gervase Markham's "Young Sportsman's Instructor":—"To cause birds to be white.—Steep the eggs of any bird two days in honey, then set 'em under the bird, and they will be white. And if you speckle eggs of any colour, and steep 'em two days in honey, it will (by the bird's sitting on them) produce birds of the same colour." The Blackbird has been known to have three broods in a season. Probably this arose when, owing to mild weather, the first nest was constructed early in the year. It has been found so early as January. Shakespeare

gives laundry-maids a caution to look after their "lesser linen" when the kite builds. It is occasionally needful also with the Blackbird. Mr. Dixon relates an instance of a quantity of fine linen laid out on a grass-plot to bleach. Among these articles was a lady's cap trimmed with very expensive lace. Towards nightfall, when the linen was collected, the cap was missing. A search took place, inquiry was made, but no trace of the missing article could be discovered. The matter was forgotten, until, after some time, the gardener, on cutting a thick yew-hedge, discovered the cap. A Blackbird had carried it off to weave into the coarse fibres and grass which formed the outside of its nest. The nest itself was beautiful with this novel decoration. It was removed, put under a glass case, and formed an object of great interest in the lady's drawing-room.

This bird is a favourite with fanciers, though to those who know it in freedom and love its wild song—its "blithe lay," as Scott rightly calls it—it seems only one degree less miserable in its cage than the poor skylark so confined and hung outside a window in some noisy street of London. Bechstein describes the song of the caged Blackbird as "so strong and clear that in a city it may be heard from one end of a long street to the other. Its memory is so good that it will retain several airs at once, and it will even repeat little sentences. It is much valued by the lovers of a plaintive, clear, and musical song, and may in these respects be preferred to the bullfinch, whose voice is softer, more flute-like, but also more melancholy. The price of these two birds, if well taught, is about the same."

The beginning and end of spring might almost be reckoned from the Blackbird's song. So Broderip writes—

"The Blackbird piped so loud and clear,  
The thrush the air was filling,  
Above a floating downy cloud  
The heavenward lark was trilling,  
And loudly did the cuckoo call  
As he his way was winging ;"

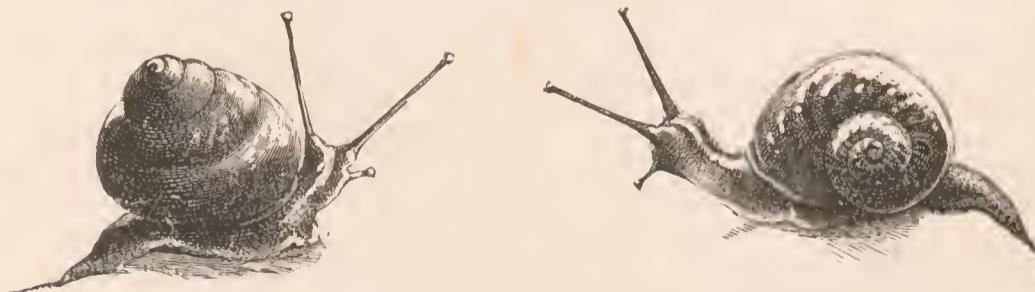
and these are among the best-known sounds of early spring. A poet of greater fame associates its close with the cessation of the bird's song in his pretty idyll, which may be quoted as intimately connected with English rural scenery and the haunts of the Blackbird—

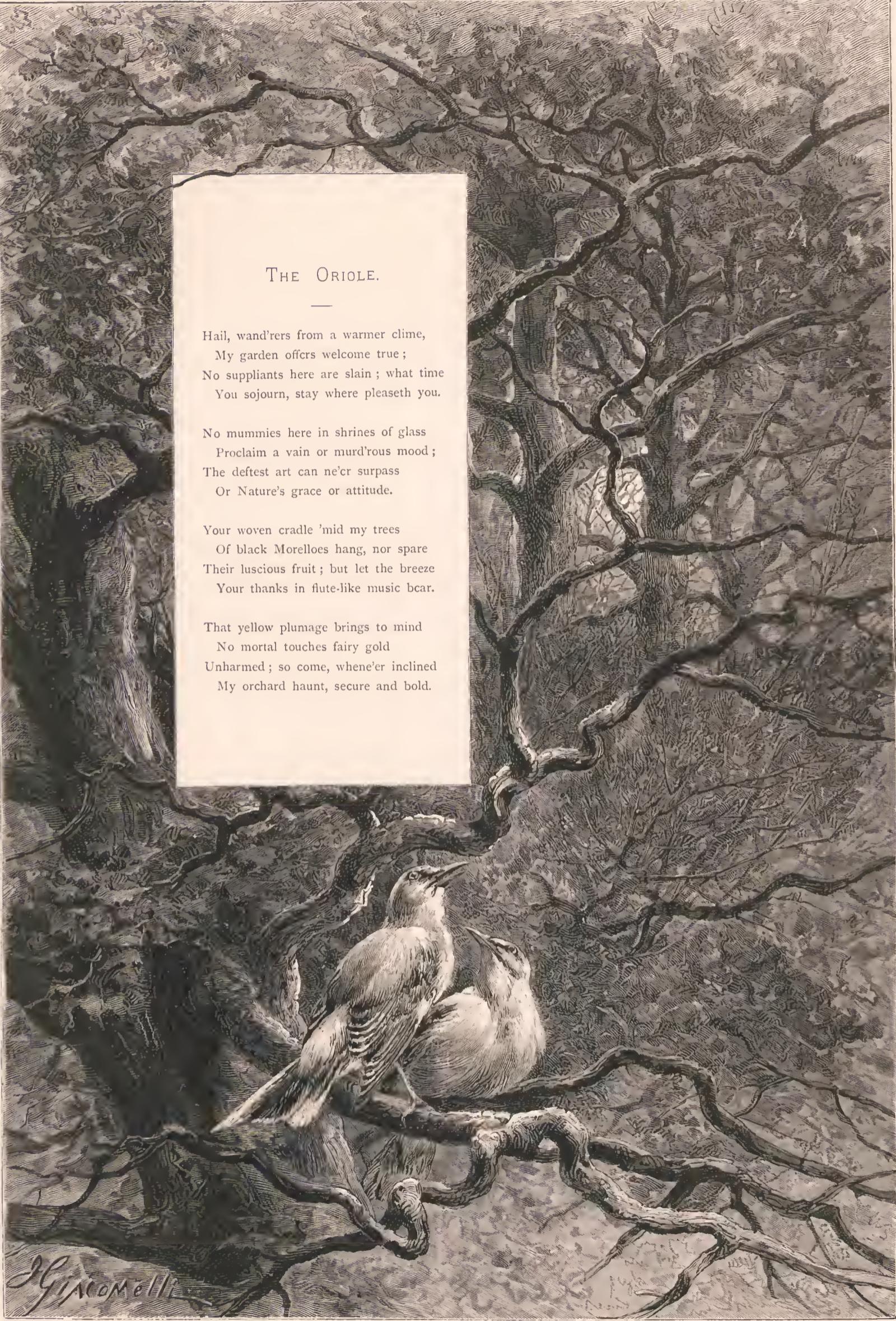
"In an English lane,  
By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies ;  
Hark ! those two in the hazel coppice—  
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please.  
Making love, say—  
The happier they

Draw yourself up from the light of the moon  
And let them pass, as they will too soon,  
With the bean-flower's boon,  
And the Blackbird's tune,  
And May and June!"

In any country walk the Blackbird hopping under a hedge or flitting down it in fear is a familiar sight. It would often escape unnoticed, but its scream of alarm at once betrays it. Its brother, the ring-ousel, has an unpleasant habit, when disturbed during early summer in the stony solitudes of the north, where it loves to build, of sitting on a wall or rock and clucking and whistling and flying distractedly round the intruder upon its domain, probably a gentle angler who only wishes to be left in peace while he makes a cast or two in the neighbouring stream. We have never known the timid Blackbird do this. Matthew Arnold beautifully speaks of the bird as fearless when the dreaming, inoffensive Scholar Gipsy of his poem passes through the scenery around Oxford, every feature in his description of it being dear to the old University man who has so often wandered pensively among the same woodlands. The stanza is, however, so intrinsically excellent that it may well end our account of the Blackbird—

"In autumn, on the skirts of Bagley Wood,  
Where most the gipsies by the turf-edged way  
Pitch their smoked tents, and every bush you see  
With scarlet patches tagg'd, and shreds of grey,  
Above the forest-ground called Thessaly,  
The Blackbird picking food  
Sees thee, nor stops his meal, nor fears at all!  
So often has he known thee past him stray  
Rapt, twirling in thy hand a withered spray  
And waiting for the spark from Heaven to fall."





## THE ORIOLE.

---

Hail, wand'fers from a warmer clime,  
My garden offrs welcome true ;  
No suppliants here are slain ; what time  
You sojourn, stay where pleaseth you.

No mummies here in shrines of glass  
Proclaim a vain or murd'rous mood ;  
The deftest art can ne'er surpass  
Or Nature's grace or attitude.

Your woven cradle 'mid my trees  
Of black Morelloes hang, nor spare  
Their luscious fruit ; but let the breeze  
Your thanks in flute-like music bear.

That yellow plumage brings to mind  
No mortal touches fairy gold  
Unharmed ; so come, whene'er inclined  
My orchard haunt, secure and bold.

J. Giacometti



## THE ORIOLE.

(*Oriolus galbula*, L.)



THE Oriole, or Golden Oriole, as it is sometimes called, is the only European species of its family. With us it is an occasional visitor, and being almost always shot on account of its gay plumage in the senseless manner which actuates so many people with regard to rare birds as soon as they are seen, its habits have for the most part to be studied on the Continent. Fortunately it is there common enough, breeding occasionally (though there is some doubt about this) even in Sweden, and being plentiful in South Russia, Germany, and the southern countries of Europe. It is also known in Egypt, and along the whole north coast of Africa, at Trebizond and Smyrna. It breeds, too, in Asia Minor and the Holy Land, while it has been observed in the Madeiras and Azores. Its colours are tropical in their brilliancy, and scarcely accord with our dull skies and sombre woodlands. First, however, let the characteristics of its family be noted. The bill is long, conical, and moderately broad at the base, thence gradually curving downwards to a point, which is notched. The wings, too, are long, the first quill short, the third or fourth being the longest; the tail is of moderate length, and slightly rounded. The whole length of the bird is nine inches and a half—that is, nearly as large as our blackbird, and slightly larger than the thrush. The sexes differ greatly in

appearance. The male is dressed when at his best estate in gold, and is very conspicuous, but he does not seem to arrive at this fulness of beauty until his third year. Then his bill is orange-brown, with a dark streak from its base to the eye. The whole of his plumage is bright gamboge-yellow, with the exception of the wings and the tail, which are black, but the middle of the wing when closed is yellow, and the tail feathers terminate in yellow. The female is greenish-olive above, greyish-white below, where the plumage is marked by distinct greyish-brown streaks disposed longitudinally. The wings and tail are olive-grey, tail tinged with black, and it has no dark streak behind the bill and eye. This soberness of colour seems a providential arrangement to render her less conspicuous when nesting cares and the importance of rearing the young press upon her. The male bird can escape then into thick foliage, but she is either sitting or occupied about the brood. The young birds themselves resemble the mother in sombre colouring, though the males can be distinguished by their lighter tints. A variety of the bird has been found with black spots on a brilliant yellow ground.

During the first two years of the male's life it is scarcely possible to distinguish it from its mate; in the second year it is more yellow and advanced in its colours, but the plumage is not yet bright.

Orioles live much in woods and thickets, remaining in pairs until they band together for the autumnal migration. In all the species known, the prevalent colour of the males is yellow, while their mates are dressed in tarnished yellow or greenish plumage. The so-called Golden Oriole is known by the French as *loriot*, and by the Germans as Wiedewal or Witwell. Professor Newton remarks on this—"With these is clearly cognate the English 'Witwall,' though when this is nowadays used at all it is applied to the green woodpecker, probably as the bird which by its colours most recalled to our Teutonic forefathers the Continental species so familiar to them." Its cry is loud, full, and flute-like. And the name Oriole seems a corruption of the Latin "Aureolus," "pretty little bird dressed in gold." Hence it is like gilding refined gold to talk of the bird as the Golden Oriole.

The Oriole's habits are secluded, haunting lonely groves and thickets on the skirts of woods, excepting in autumn, when it flies to the orchards and commits great havoc amongst their fruit. It loves to keep in the most bushy trees, so as rarely to be seen on a bare branch. It is difficult to get near it, but the expert sportsman can sometimes approach under the deception of an imitative whistling, but the ear of the bird is so acute that a single mistake or false note sends it off at once. In the high trees which Orioles frequent, besides concealment they find

soft insects, caterpillars, and fruits. Bechstein expresses the loud flute-like whistle of the bird by the word "puhlo."

The flat and saucer-shaped nest of this species is very different in the style of its construction from that of nearly all other British birds, being placed in, and suspended under, the horizontal fork of the bough of a tree, and firmly attached to both branches. The nest is composed of sheep's wool, fibres of roots, and long slender stems of grass, which are curiously interwoven, so that the nest is pendulous, and yet is well supported. Its lining consists of the flowering heads of grasses. The eggs are usually four or five in number, purplish-white, with a few reddish-purple or ash-grey spots, and the female watches over them with such solicitude that it is said she will suffer herself to be taken off the nest rather than abandon them. A few visit England almost every year between spring and autumn, as the bird makes its annual visit to the European continent from its home south of the Mediterranean in the month of April, and returns in September. The end of April and beginning of May are therefore the most usual times for its being observed in our southern counties, and some of the birds which were on their way to north-west France are sometimes seen in the eastern maritime counties. Thus Cornwall, and especially Norfolk, Kent, and Suffolk are most frequently visited by the Oriole. In the west of England it has been seen by forty at a time. A nest was taken at Ord, in Kent, in June, 1836, which contained young birds, but they unfortunately died; and in 1849, at the end of May, the old birds were procured, as well as their nest, which held three eggs, near Elmstone. It was suspended from the top branch of an oak, and was made of wool, bound together with dry grass. It has been seen in Northamptonshire, too, and so far north as Yorkshire, near Scarborough. Thus the Oriole may be said to appear somewhere in England most seasons. It is a capricious bird about building, however, the migratory instinct seeming to keep it restless, so that often when it appears in suitable localities for breeding, a nest may be looked for in vain.

It has been seen in the south or east of Ireland several times. One was killed in the Isle of Man in June, 1868; while as regards Scotch localities, it has occurred in the Isle of Arran, in Berwickshire, Fife, and Ross.

Johns quotes an account of the Oriole's song, which may be added to complete our account:—"His note is a very loud whistle, which may be heard at a great distance, but in richness equaling the flute stop of a fine-toned organ. But variety there is none in his song, as he never utters more than three notes consecutively, and those at intervals of half a minute or a minute. Were it not for its fine

tone, therefore, his song would be as monotonous as that of the missel thrush, which in modulation it greatly resembles."

Unfortunately for itself, besides the name of *giallone*, which it receives in Italy from its yellow plumage, it is also known there as *becquafiga*, and as it becomes very fat after its summer feasting on fruits, retribution naturally follows. It is snared and exposed for sale in the poulters' shops at Naples, and is celebrated for its delicate flesh and savour as a *beccafico*.

Seeing how short its stay is, and how uncertain its visit to us, it need surprise no one that neither English poetry nor superstition have made use of its golden colours. Among the Romans Martial speaks of it as easily deceived by snares and nets when grapes are green, inferring that it becomes wiser as they ripen. Pliny has seized a glimmering of the truth when he relates how it builds its nest suspended like a cup from a twig, so that no quadruped can reach it; but forthwith trusts to Tuscan folk-lore when he goes on to say men confidently affirm that the Orioles themselves sleep hanging downwards by their legs, because they think this the safest posture. And here is another delightful scrap of folk-lore from the same author. If a sufferer from jaundice can only catch sight of an Oriole, he will at once be cured, owing to the bird's yellow colour, and the Oriole itself will die. This kind of superstition lingered for many centuries, and is perhaps not yet wholly extinct among rustics. It gave birth to the mediæval medical doctrine of signatures.

If we turn to the American Oriole, however, Lowell introduces it in a pretty verse of his palinode, "Autumn"—

"Two watched yon Oriole's pendent dome,  
That now is void and dank with rain,  
And one—O hope more frail than foam!  
The bird to his deserted home  
Sings not—'We meet again!'"

And the same writer has not forgotten it in his essay on "My Garden Acquaintance." His words may be quoted, as they exemplify some of the characteristics of the Continental Oriole, our occasional visitor—"Orioles are in great plenty with me. I have seen seven males flashing about the garden at once. A merry crew of them swing their hammocks from the pendulous boughs. During one of these latter years when the canker-worms stripped our elms as bare as winter, these birds went to the trouble of rebuilding their unroofed nests, and chose for the purpose trees which are safe from those swarming vandals, such as the ash and the button-wood. One year a pair (disturbed, I suppose, elsewhere) built a second nest in an elm, within





a few yards of the house. My friend, Edward E. Hale, told me once that the Oriole rejected from his web all strands of brilliant colour, and thought it a striking example of that instinct of concealment noticeable in many birds, though it should seem in this instance that the nest was amply protected by its position from all marauders but owls and squirrels. Last year, however, I had the fullest proof that Mr. Hale was mistaken. A pair of Orioles built on the lowest trailer of a weeping elm, which hung within ten feet of our drawing-room window, and so low that I could reach it from the ground. The nest was wholly woven and felted with ravellings of woollen carpet, in which scarlet predominated. Would the same thing have happened in the woods? Or did the nearness of a human dwelling perhaps give the birds a greater feeling of security? They are very bold, by the way, in quest of cordage, and I have often watched them stripping the fibrous bark from a honeysuckle growing over the very door.\* The species here described may be the Baltimore Oriole (*Uphantes Baltimore*), a bird beautifully clothed in brilliantly contrasted orange and black plumage, which is common through the vast extent of country reaching from Canada to Brazil; or from mention of the domes of the nests, the Crested Oriole (*Cacicus cristatus*). This is as large as a jackdaw; the greater part of its body is chocolate colour, the wings are dark green, and the outer tail feathers bright yellow. The beak is remarkable, being of a bright green colour, extending far up into the forehead. It builds a pensile nest, fastened to the end of a bough, and is fond of man and his habitations, so that its habits are easily watched. Yet another American Oriole is well known to readers of the literature of that country, the Orchard Oriole or Bobolink (*Xanthornis varius*). This, too, is a beautifully marked bird, though its colours are extremely variable. The upper plumage of the adult male is mostly a deep black, the breast is black and chestnut-red, while the under parts are the same, tipped with white. It loves the neighbourhood and protection of man, and is fond of building in orchards. Its nest is built so as to hang from a pendent bough, very often the branch of a weeping willow. "Almost the whole genus of Orioles," says Wilson, "belong to America, and with a few exceptions build pensile nests." With reference to the Baltimore Oriole, he adds some particulars which may be here subjoined to close the account of its cousin the Golden Oriole—"So solicitous is it to procure proper materials for its nest that, in the season of building, the women in the country are under the necessity of narrowly watching their thread that may chance to be bleaching, and the farmer to secure his young grafts, as the Baltimore, finding the former and the

\* "My Study Windows," by J. R. Lowell (Sampson Low and Co.), 1871, p. 12.

strings which tie the latter so well adapted for his purpose, frequently carries off both; or should the one be too heavy, and the other too firmly tied, he will tug at them a considerable time before he gives up the attempt. Skeins of silk and hanks of thread have been often found, after the leaves were fallen, hanging round the Baltimore's nest, but so woven up and entangled as to be entirely irreclaimable. Before the introduction of Europeans no such material could have been obtained here; but with the sagacity of a good architect he has improved this circumstance to his advantage, and the strongest and best materials are uniformly found in those parts by which the whole is supported.\* All birds, however, accommodate themselves more or less to their surroundings when they build nests, and are wont to use for them what is most convenient. Thus we have found a chaffinch's nest, the exterior of which was formed as usual of lichens, but most beautifully hung with very small scraps of a letter written in blue ink, which we had ourselves torn up and thrown away in its vicinity a few days before.

By way of showing the popular ignorance of ornithology, it may be noted that three or four years ago a letter appeared in the *Times* stating the writer had seen a flock of Orioles in late autumn on a tree in Hyde Park. These proved to be fieldfares and redwings which had just arrived here for the winter.

The Oriole, in spite of its harsh fluting, stands high as a mimic when kept in confinement. Thus Bechstein saw two which had been reared from the nest; one of which, independently of the natural song, whistled a minuet, and the other imitated a flourish of trumpets. One of his neighbours saw two at Berlin, both of which could whistle different airs. The French interpretation of its natural song is *Louisat bonne merises*, and their rhyme runs

“C'est le compère loriot,  
Qui mange les cerises et laisse le noyau.”

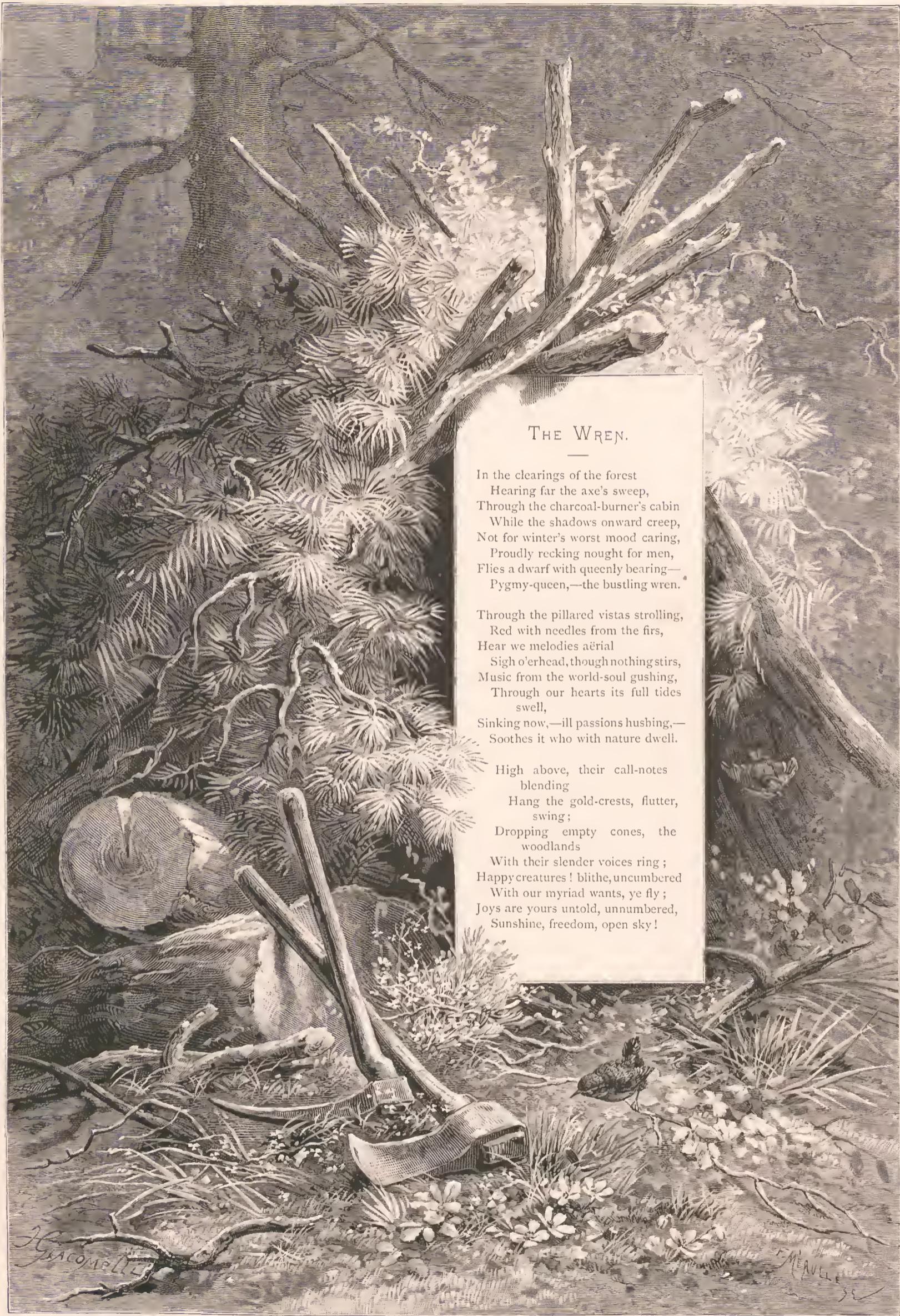
Broderip relates that they have a saying that the discovery of an Oriole's nest bodes no good to the finder. The reason of this is apparent when it is remembered in what dangerous positions the bird generally builds.

A bird which is very similar to this one (and often regarded as the same) is really an Indian species (*Oriolus kundoo*). Professor Newton says that it may immediately be recognised by having the dark mark behind the eye reaching to some distance above the ear covers; the wing is also much shorter, not reaching nearly to the end of the tail, and the bill is proportionately longer.

\* Wilson's "American Ornithology."

Another and very different bird is popularly known in Africa as the Golden Oriole. This is one of the *Ploceinæ* or weaver birds, also celebrated for their singularly-woven nests—the *Ploceus ocularius*—and it is really a finch. Its nests resemble a huge horse-pistol with the barrels pointing downward, and they are invariably hung from the end of pliant branches over water, so that any addition to the weight of the bough immerses the nests. Though gregarious in their nesting arrangements, the separate pairs keep mostly together. The male and female are so devoted to their duties when incubating that they may with the greatest ease be taken alive. The reason of the curious shape and choice of locality adopted by these birds is in order to baffle monkeys and snakes. Any such would-be invader is at once dipped into the water and effectually prevented from plundering the birds' treasures. No more beautiful instance of the methods which instinct teaches birds to employ for safety can be conceived than the nests of this species. The bird itself is nearly as large as a thrush, of a bright yellow colour, except the tips of the wings, which are brownish. Thus it may be seen how colonists from Europe have given this bird the name of the bird they so well remembered at their old homes. An eye-witness forwarded to Mr. Wood the following account of the African so-called Golden Oriole:—"The birds make a great disturbance when building, there being usually a regular fight in order to secure the best places. In building the birds first commence by working some stout flags or reeds from the branch, so as to hang downwards. They then attach the upper part of the nest to the branch, so as to form the dome-like roof. By degrees they complete the globular bulb, still working downwards, and lastly the neck is attached to the body of the nest. Great skill is required to keep the neck even and open, and yet no machine could accomplish the work better than do these ingenious little architects. The upper part of the nest is very thick and firmly built, more than twice as thick as the neck, and the material of which it is made is far stronger. In some instances I have seen one nest attached to another; and when this is the case, the second builder strengthens the first nest, and then attaches his own work thereto."

"Should by chance a hawk or monkey venture into the vicinity of a colony of birds, it is chased and chirped at by hundreds of these little creatures, who make common cause against the intruder, and quickly drive him off. During the building of the nests, the river-side is a most interesting place, as the intelligence and diligence of the birds are most remarkable."



### THE WREN.

In the clearings of the forest  
Hearing far the axe's sweep,  
Through the charcoal-burner's cabin  
While the shadows onward creep,  
Not for winter's worst mood caring,  
Proudly recking nought for men,  
Flies a dwarf with queenly bearing—  
Pygmy-queen,—the bustling wren.

Through the pillared vistas strolling,  
Red with needles from the firs,  
Hear we melodies aërial  
Sigh o'erhead, though nothing stirs,  
Music from the world-soul gushing,  
Through our hearts its full tides  
swell,  
Sinking now,—ill passions hushing,—  
Soothes it who with nature dwell.

High above, their call-notes  
blending  
Hang the gold-crests, flutter,  
swing;  
Dropping empty cones, the  
woodlands  
With their slender voices ring ;  
Happy creatures ! blithe, uncumbered  
With our myriad wants, ye fly ;  
Joys are yours untold, unnumbered,  
Sunshine, freedom, open sky !

J. G. COMPTON

E. M. AVEY



## THE WREN.

(*Troglodytes Europaeus*, L.)

THE Wren is another bird which, like the robin, has acquired a certain sanctity from its habit of resorting to man's abodes in severe weather. This has caused a well-known distich of folk-lore to associate them—

“The robin and the Wren  
Are God Almighty's cock and hen;  
Who harries their nest,  
Never shall his soul have rest.”

With its sprightly bearing, its tail carried erect, and its perpetual activity, the Wren is a familiar bird to all lovers of the country. At ordinary times it frequents hedges, hopping in and out of the lower parts, twisting round branches, and generally working forwards with an upward tendency. After a little it flies down again, and once more begins its busy search. Farm-yards, stacks of faggots, and the neighbourhood of villages tempt it in winter to quit the bare hedges. It often resorts to cow-sheds and hovels too, generally roosting in their thatch during severe nights, where it has occasionally been found consorting with its kind for warmth, and notwithstanding their ordinary defiance of cold weather, frozen to death. Its scientific name imports that it creeps into caves (like the *Troglodytes* of the ancients), and has



a European distribution. This latter characteristic is the case, as it is found in Sweden and the Faroe Isles, throughout the British Isles, in Spain, France, and Italy, and in Trebizond and Smyrna. Linnaeus states that it builds its nest, like a true cave-dweller, "under the earth," which is true in the sense that it is occasionally found in a bank; but the name of cave-dweller belongs more appropriately to the Wren from its love of peering into and searching carefully all crevices in timber, the dark sides of ditches, and thick hedge-bottoms above them. It frequently examines the bars of windows, and even enters outhouses and churches to procure insects which form, if not its sole, at least its staple food, and seldom associates either with its own kind or other birds. Its call is a brisk "chip, chip;" but it indulges in a sweet though a short strain at times, in sunny noons, for instance, during autumn, and especially in March, when the real work of its life, nest-building and rearing a family, commences. The Wren's plumage is of a beautifully soft texture and mottled brown colour; its wings are short, and it does not often commit itself to long flights. Its tail varies in length, but is generally short, the feathers being soft and rounded, and highly esteemed by trout-fishers for making artificial flies. The whole length of the bird is but three inches and three-quarters.

The most curious part of the Wren's life-history consists in its nidification. It begins to build very early in the year, choosing very varied and at times singular spots. The nest is generally begun from the sides, or even the top, and occasionally, as with other birds, from the foundation. It is composed of moss, fastened together with spiders' webs, hung with lichen, hay, or withered leaves to deceive the passers-by, and pierced with a small entrance. The inside is carefully lined with feathers. Wordsworth writes truly in his lines "On a Wren's Nest"—

"Among the dwellings framed by birds  
In field or forest with nice care,  
Is none that with the little Wren's  
In snugness may compare."

The whole poem ("Works," ii., p. 52) is well worth reading as a sample of the poet's careful study of nature. Alluding to the protective instincts of the Wren, he tells how—

"She who planned the mossy lodge,  
Mistrusting her evasive skill,  
Had to a primrose looked for aid  
Her wishes to fulfil.

"The primrose for a veil had spread  
The largest of her upright leaves;  
And thus, for purposes benign,  
A simple flower deceives."

Few birds are more jealous of human interference than the Wren. A touch to the nest, especially the introduction of a finger into it before eggs are laid, will almost certainly cause the parents to forsake. When once eggs are laid, however, and still more when the young are hatched, they are just as careless of man's interruptions. The old bird may even be caught on the nest, and she will not forsake her nest. The eggs vary in number from six to twelve, or even sixteen, and are of a delicate white, with a few pink spots at the larger end. Most boys have abstracted two or three of these and supplied their place with small white stones. Frequently the old bird, unconscious of the deception, goes on laying. Another curious fact connected with the Wren's nidification is that two or three empty and seemingly forsaken nests are frequently found in the vicinity of the one actually selected for the eggs. Some suppose that these are actually nests which the old ones have left in disgust on account of their having been disturbed. Others fancy that they are "cock-nests," made for shelter or amusement by the male bird. They have also been supposed to be for shelter in the winter. Undoubtedly they are often thus used, but the best explanation seems to be that the male constructs them near the true nest, but does not line them with feathers, in order to lead searchers from the real nest, which is generally more carefully hid. This is a point, however, in the Wren's economy which yet requires more investigation.

Mr. Weir watched the building of a Wren's nest with much care. It was begun at 7 a.m. on May 30, and the whole external covering was completed by 7 at night. During the next few days feathers for lining were carried in, and the whole nest completed before noon on June 8. The same observer found that the young were fed at least 278 times in the course of a day. The Wren has not unfrequently two broods in the year. Jesse relates that "a gentleman fond of observing the habits of birds, on visiting one day a cottage in his neighbourhood, was told by some children of a Wren's nest in a low hedge near the cottage. Wishing to have it left unmolested, he promised the children that if they would take care of it he would give them a reward. On visiting the nest a short time afterwards he found that the usual hole of the nest had been stopped up, and immediately accused the children of having broken their promise not to touch the nest. They protested that they had never once meddled with it, or disturbed the

old bird, but acknowledged that they had frequently looked at it. On examining the nest more attentively, it was found that the original hole of entrance to it had been stopped up, and that another had been made at the back. It was evident that the bird, disliking to be looked at, and feeling unwilling to forsake her eggs, had taken this method of obviating the inconvenience to which she was subjected." Mr. Morris gives instances of uncommon situations for the nest; one adapted from that of a swallow; another constructed in a bunch of herbs hung up to a beam against the top of an outhouse, almost the entire nest being formed of the herbs. The tops of honeysuckle and raspberry bushes are also favourite localities for a Wren's nest. The roof of a hovel is another place where we have frequently found it. Waterton calls attention to the fact that when most insect-eating birds leave us in winter, the robin, the Wren, and the hedge-sparrow invariably remain, manage in spite of cold weather to find food, and on the return of spring are not found to have suffered more than others which are apparently better suited to brave the rigour of the English climate. Mr. Cordeaux, who has paid great attention to migration, believes that every autumn our native birds are largely increased by arrivals from the Continent. This is certainly the case with the Golden-crested Wren (*Regulus cristatus*), and seemingly with others of our common birds, such as the blackbird and magpie.

Among his other birds which rejoice on May Day Chaucer does not forget to make the Wren "scippin and daunce." Shakespeare shows that his wonted love for the country had led him to notice this bird, though he is rather hard on the "chirping of the Wren" in the "Merchant of Venice" (v. 1)—

"No better a musician than the Wren."

Perhaps he meant the Wren, however, in Henry IV.'s words—

"Thou art a summer bird  
Which ever in the haunch of winter sings  
The lifting up of day."

At all events, the description answers exactly to what all country dwellers must have remarked. Again he notes ("Macbeth," iv. 2)—

"The poor Wren,  
The most diminutive of birds, will fight,  
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl."

Mr. Harting questions this last statement as an ornithological fact; but it is not improbable, looking to the Wren's character. He also corrects Shakespeare with





regard to its diminutive size, asserting truly that the Golden-crested Wren is our smallest bird. It is quite possible, however, if Shakespeare must be proved accurate on such points, to defend him by saying that he used the word "Wren" generically, and meant the Golden-crested Wren. He had evidently been a bird-nester in his boyhood, and knew how many eggs the Wren lays, from the words—

"Look where the youngest Wren of nine comes."—*Richard III.*, i. 3.

The Wren is a famous bird in folk-lore. The Cornish lads say—

"Who hurts the robin or the Wren  
Will never prosper, sea or land."

Together with the eagle, the Indo-European tradition\* regarded it as a bringer-down of fire for men from heaven. Thus it was hostile to the eagle, and as far back as Pliny's time was deemed the king of birds. In France it is still known as *roitelet* ("little king"), and the same name runs through many of its appellations in other languages. The strife between the eagle and the Wren arose, according to the Irish legend, from the agreement of the birds that whichever of them could fly higher should be their king. The Wren roguishly hopped on to the eagle's tail, unknown to that bird, as they proceeded to make the trial. When the eagle was miles above the rest, regarding itself as the conqueror, and too tired to fly higher, the Wren darted upwards a perch and a half, and asserted loudly its superiority. The eagle was obliged to confess himself vanquished, but gave the Wren a stroke of his wing as he flew down; and from that day to this the Wren has never been able to fly higher than a hawthorn-bush. Tennyson has an allusion to this tale in—

"Shall eagles not be eagles? Wrens be Wrens?"

The Wren, again, has been believed to share in what is generally deemed the peculiar office of the robin—

"Call for the robin redbreast and the Wren,  
Since o'er shady groves they hover,  
And with leaves and flowers do cover  
The friendless bodies of unburied men."

The most curious fact connected with the legendary history of the Wren, however, is the persecution it meets with in many countries, especially on St. Stephen's Day. Several reasons, varying with the locality, are assigned for this

\* See Kelly's "Indo-European Folk-lore," p. 77.

cruelty. The Druids are stated to have regarded the Wren as the king of birds. The superstitious respect which they paid it gave offence to the early Christian missionaries, and by their commands the bird is still hunted and killed on Christmas Day, and on the next (St. Stephen's) day it is carried about, hung in a loop of string, and processions of children in Ireland sing and ask for gifts as they bear it round. In Essex the same superstition is (or was until lately) acted upon, boys chasing and killing Wrens, and then bearing them from house to house singing—

“The Wren, the Wren, the king of the birds,  
St. Stephen's Day was killed in the furze;  
Although he is little, his honour is great;  
And so, good people, pray give us a treat.”

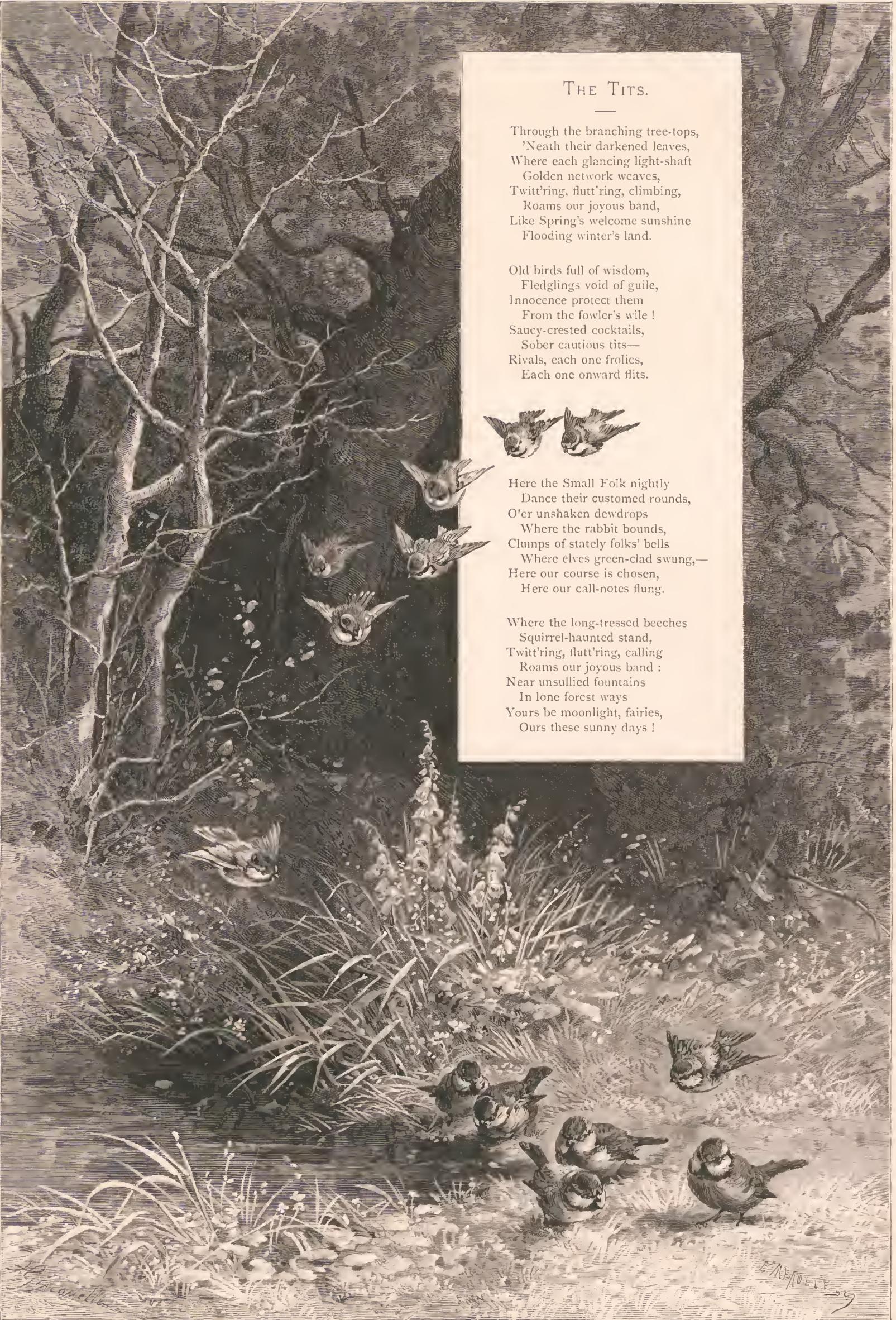
The origin of this persecution is reported to have sprung from the Wren giving notice to the Danes just before they were to have been massacred, by which they escaped. In Ireland another form of this story is given by Aubrey (“Miscellanies,” 1696, p. 47). After speaking of the last battle fought in the north of Ireland between the Protestants and Papists, at Glinsuly, in Donegal, he says:—“Near the same place a party of Protestants had been surprised sleeping by the Popish Irish were it not for several Wrens, that just wakened them by dancing and pecking on the drums as the enemy were approaching. For this reason the wild Irish mortally hate these birds to this day, calling them the devil's servants, and killing them wherever they catch them. They teach their children to thrust them full of thorns. You will see sometimes, on holidays, a whole parish running like madmen from hedge to hedge a Wren-hunting.” Yet another variant appears in the Isle of Man, where the Wren is believed to be a transformed fairy; for once upon a time a fairy of great malevolence oppressed the island, until a knight-errant attempted her destruction. Just at the last moment, however, she saved herself by slipping through his fingers in the form of a Wren. Hence every New Year's Day (when a spell condemned her to reappear in the same form) Wrens are remorselessly hunted down and destroyed by the men and boys of the island. It is curious, however, that these cruel practices do not seem to prevail amongst the Scotch section of the Celtic race. In that country the popular rhyme protects the little bird by putting it under the care of the Virgin—

“Malisons, malisons mair than ten,  
Who harries the Ladye of Heaven's Wren.”

The Golden-Crested Wren (*Regulus cristatus*), figured in our second engraving, well merits a few words. It is a social, friendly bird, generally seen in fir-woods,

in small companies, hunting among the branches, hanging head downwards, and flitting backwards and forwards, uttering meanwhile its call-note. It is beautifully coloured in grey, olive-green, and white, with a very conspicuous yellow crest, which is lemon-yellow in the female, and has the honour of being the smallest British bird, five and a half full-grown birds of this species only weighing, it is said, one ounce. Its nest is a beautiful structure, usually suspended and enwoven among the boughs of a spruce or silver fir, of a globular form, with an opening at the top, and holds from five to eight cream-coloured eggs. This bird is of a family distinct from that of the common Wren, and seems a link between the warblers and the tits. It is perfectly hardy, and seems to revel in severe weather. Many stay with us all the year, changing at times their locality, while many more come over to join these in October. It breeds early, and has probably two broods annually, as we once saw a small family of gold crests, five or six in number, sitting on the low branches of a fir-tree on a lawn in July. The parent birds flitted backwards and forwards, almost brushing us with their wings as they passed, so fearless were they, while feeding the little ones. These sat and hopped up and down the branch, little woolly balls with grey heads, and no crests as yet, and absurdly short tails, uttering "tzit, tzit, tzit" as the parents dropped food into their gaping mouths. It was a beautiful sight, and well repaid the spectator for the protection granted birds in the garden which these diminutive "little kings" haunted.





## THE TITS.

Through the branching tree-tops,  
'Neath their darkened leaves,  
Where each glancing light-shaft  
Golden network weaves,  
Twitt'ring, flutt'ring, climbing,  
Roams our joyous band,  
Like Spring's welcome sunshine  
Flooding winter's land.

Old birds full of wisdom,  
Fledglings void of guile,  
Innocence protect them  
From the fowler's wile !  
Saucy-crested cocktails,  
Sober cautious tits—  
Rivals, each one frolics,  
Each one onward flits.



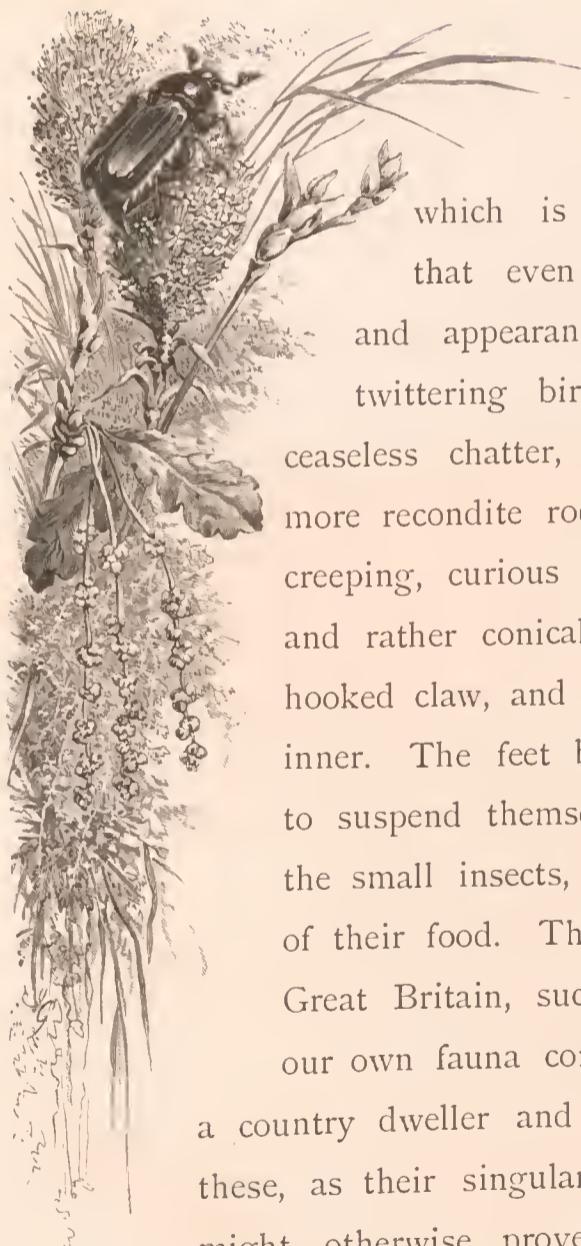
Here the Small Folk nightly  
Dance their customed rounds,  
O'er unshaken dewdrops  
Where the rabbit bounds,  
Clumps of stately folks' bells  
Where elves green-clad swung,—  
Here our course is chosen,  
Here our call-notes flung.

Where the long-tressed beeches  
Squirrel-haunted stand,  
Twitt'ring, flutt'ring, calling  
Roams our joyous band :  
Near unsullied fountains  
In lone forest ways  
Yours be moonlight, fairies,  
Ours these sunny days !



## THE TITS.

(*Paridae.*)



THE Titmice, a widely distributed family, are perhaps best known by the Blue Titmouse, which is so trustful, engaging, and impudent a bird, that even the least observant is struck with its habits and appearance. They are for the most part small, active, twittering birds, the name "tit" seeming to refer to their ceaseless chatter, and "mouse," whether strictly belonging to a more recondite root or not, at all events sufficiently indicating the creeping, curious nature of the bird. The bill is short, straight, and rather conical; the hind toe strong, and armed with a stout hooked claw, and of the anterior toes the outer is longer than the inner. The feet being also very strongly made, the Tits are able to suspend themselves with facility in any posture, and to detect the small insects, seeds, grains, and the like which form the staple of their food. The Continent possesses several species unknown in Great Britain, such as the Sombre Tit, and the Azure Tit; but our own fauna contains six very interesting kinds. It is easy for a country dweller and well worth his trouble to discriminate between these, as their singular habits will often enliven a winter walk which might otherwise prove dull and devoid of objects to attract attention. Before describing these more particularly, it will be well to introduce them by the excellent observations of White of Selborne. "Every species of

Titmouse," he says, "winters with us. They have what I call a kind of intermediate bill between the hard and the soft, between the Linnæan genera of *Fringilla* (finch) and *Motacilla* (wagtail). One species alone spends its whole time in the woods and fields, never retreating for succour in the severest seasons to houses and neighbourhoods, and that is the delicate Long-tailed Titmouse, which is almost as minute as the golden-crowned wren; but the Blue Titmouse or Nun, the Cole-mouse, the Great Black-headed Titmouse, and the Marsh Titmouse, all resort at times to buildings, and in hard weather particularly. The Great Titmouse, driven by stress of weather, much frequents houses, and in deep snows I have seen this bird, while it hung with its back downwards (to my no small delight and admiration), draw straws lengthwise from out the eaves of thatched houses, in order to pull out the flies that were concealed between them, and that in such numbers that they quite defaced the thatch and gave it a ragged appearance."

The largest of our British Tits is the Great Tit (*Parus major*), sometimes known as the Oxeye. It is about the size of a sparrow; the head, throat, and a line passing down the centre of its breast are black, its cheeks and a spot on the nape are white, while the rest of the plumage on the breast is yellow, and the back is olive-green or bluish. It is a bold and fearless bird, especially in defence of its nest, and when shut up with other small birds is said to be of cannibal habits, as it will break open their skulls with repeated blows of its powerful bill, and then feed on the contents. This shows how varied is its food. Insects, however, and seeds in autumn form its usual diet, and it is unwearyed in its search for them. A walk through a fir plantation in winter or along a road bordered with larches will generally show the bird-lover a party of Great Tits, hanging in every attitude on the branches, and fluttering from one tree to another while searching every leaf or cranny in the bark likely to conceal insects. It is fond of enclosures and sheltered districts, and may be found in every county of Great Britain, but is somewhat local towards the north of Scotland. It is common throughout Ireland and almost every part of Europe, extending beyond the Arctic circle, and has been seen in Algeria and the Holy Land. The female is not so conspicuous in her colours as the male. The notes of the Great Tit are frequently harsh, though White says it possesses three joyous calls; these begin early in February. At the same time it begins to build its nest, which is constructed in the hole of a wall or tree, sometimes in more curious positions, and contains from six to nine eggs, pure white, tinged with red or yellow spots. Often seen

in gardens, it is well to remember that the Great Tit is fond of nuts and the ripest sides of apples. He must be a churlish gardener, however, who shoots this active interesting bird. The country folk call it "Sit-ye-down," because it utters three cheerful notes at times not unlike these words.

The Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*) is to be seen everywhere—in the hedgerow, at the stackyard, near kitchen doors, in gardens; and everywhere it is conspicuous for its bustling activity, its quaint modes of hanging on branches, and its extreme beauty. Were it less common, this latter quality would be more prized. Its head is blue tinged with white, back olive-green, breast yellow traversed by a dark blue line, while its saucy carriage and bright eye greatly enhance its attractions. "Besides insects," says White, "it is very fond of flesh, for it frequently picks bones on dunghills. It is a vast admirer of suet, and haunts butchers' shops. When a boy, I have known twenty caught in a morning with snap mouse-traps baited with tallow or suet. It will also pick holes in apples left on the ground, and be well entertained with the seeds on the head of a sunflower." They do far more good than harm, however, in a garden by clearing buds of insects. Its nest is generally built in a hole in a wall; an old post or tree are also favourite places. The eggs are from seven or eight in number to as many as sixteen, or even eighteen, like the Great Tit's, but smaller. The mother bird defends her nest with great fierceness, erecting the feathers on her head and hissing, even biting the fingers which would lay hold of her. She is a most affectionate parent, and will return to the same resting-place, if unmolested, for many years. A curious story is told by Professor Newton of this tendency. From about 1779 to 1873 a pair of these birds built their nest in a large earthenware bottle which had been originally placed to dry in the branches of a tree near Stockton-on-Tees. In this they had safely reared and hatched their young year after year, save in one season, owing through an oversight to the bottle not having been cleared of their old nest; and on a second year they were forestalled in their home by a pair of Great Tits. The Blue Tit is found in every county of the kingdom, in Asia Minor, and over the greater part of Europe up to Trondhjem, in Norway. An easy method to watch its antics is to suspend a lump of suet by a string from a bough or a stick stuck slanting in the earth. No other bird can maintain itself on the swinging dainty. His call-notes can scarcely be called a song. Even in spring he is only more noisy than usual.

The next member of the family which may most frequently be seen, especially at the edges of plantations or in coppices, is the Cole Tit (*Parus ater*), or Coal

Tit, as some spell it, from the black colours of the bird. A casual observer might easily confuse it with the Marsh Tit, but there are strong points of difference. Johns sums up these concisely. "The head and neck of the present species is glossy black, with a patch of pure white on the nape of the neck and on the cheeks, while the head of the Marsh Tit is of a dull, sooty black, without any admixture of white, nor is there a white spot on the cheeks." The wing coverts of this species are also spotted with pure white, which never occurs in the Marsh Tit. It is found, like its congeners, in fir-woods, and seems to increase in number throughout the country wherever pines are largely planted. Like the last, it builds its nest in holes of walls and trees, and lays six or seven eggs, with rather larger spots on them than have those of the Blue Tit. In Russia the limits of this species seem to extend to Lake Baikal, and Canon Tristram has found it abundantly among the cedars on Mount Lebanon.

The Marsh Tit (*Parus palustris*) is, as its name imports, found most frequently in low, swampy situations among willows and alders, but it often visits orchards and coppices, preferring bushes, however, to lofty trees. It usually builds in old willow-trees, or any other suitable stumps, and does not even on occasion despise a rat's hole in the bank. It lays from four to eight eggs, white, spotted with dull red, like those of the other members of the Tit family. It has been supposed to vary in abundance with the previous species, being rather local in its distribution. Its call-notes are harsh, but the cock bird utters a pleasing twitter in spring. Professor Newton remarks that some authors have considered there is a certain relationship between the members of the Tit family and those of the crow tribe, of which the habit of grasping their prey with one foot while picking it may be deemed an indication. These four species of the Tits are of great benefit to the planter and gardener, and help to keep down those armies of insects which would otherwise so seriously injure vegetation. The Marsh Tit bears a considerable resemblance to the "Chickadee," or Black-cap Titmouse of North America, one of the most busy, amusing, and chattering birds of that country, of which Lowell writes—

"Far distant sounds the hidden Chickadee,  
Close at my side."

"The Titmouse," writes White, "which early in February begins to make two quaint notes, like the whetting of a saw, is the Marsh Titmouse."

The next species of the family is a rare and local one, the Crested Tit (*Parus cristatus*); indeed it does not seem to have occurred in England. It is a solitary





retired bird, inhabiting gloomy evergreen forests in Denmark, Sweden, Russia, and some parts of France. The feathers of the crown are long, and capable of being raised at the will of the bird. They are black, edged with white; the throat, collar, and a streak across the temples are black; the upper parts are reddish-brown, and the under ones white, faintly tinged with red. "It is with us a permanent resident," says Professor Newton, "in a few of the oldest forests of Scotland, which have not lost their natural growth of firs and oaks, and as such is restricted to certain valleys in the counties of Ross, Inverness, Perth, Elgin, Banff, and perhaps Aberdeen." No lover of our native birds will care to characterise its haunts more closely for fear of its extermination, just as fern-lovers are careful not to divulge the localities where the rarer ferns grow. Nests have been found of late years, built of moss and wool, felted with a little fur of the mountain hare. These birds are said to haunt in family parties the uppermost boughs of firs, though they frequently descend to the ground in quest of seeds which may have dropped from the fir-cones. Its eggs do not seem to exceed five in number in Scotland, though eight or ten are said to be laid on the Continent. It has been known to occupy the deserted nests of the squirrel and crow, but usually builds in the old stems of firs. A bird of great beauty which resembles it is the Crested Tit of the Himalayas (*P. xanthogenys*). It bears a full crest of black feathers, its ear-coverts are black, and a broad black line extends down its throat between the legs. The rest of the plumage is yellow, black, and grey.

The last British member of the family is in some respects the most interesting. The Long-tailed Tit (*Parus caudatus*) is not often seen near man or his habitations. It must be sought in the fir-woods, and there it is trustful and confiding, and will suffer an observer to draw near without flying off. The Long-tailed Tit is connected in most bird-lovers' minds with late autumn and winter, when it may be observed in small family parties holding on to the firs in every position, and gently flitting from one tree to the next through the wood. The parents and brood thus keep together until the following spring. The whole length of the bird is  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches. The prevailing colours are black and white, but the sides of the back and scapulars are tinged with rose-red; the under parts are reddish-white, the tail very long, and the beak very short. It is common throughout Great Britain, where her woods invite it for food and shelter. Besides its family companionship this bird is remarkable for its nest, which is the most beautifully constructed inwardly and outwardly of all our bird architecture. In shape it is nearly oval, with a small hole in the upper half; hence the bird is known provincially as

the Bottle Tit. We have found it in the middle of a thick bramble or hawthorn bush, with the twigs of which it is so interwoven that they must be cut before the nest can be removed. Owing to the blue and silver-coloured lichens which are fastened to the outside, itself made of moss, wool, and spiders' nests, the nest is very difficult to be detected save by a practised eye. The inside is thickly lined with soft feathers. Macgillivray counted these in one case, and found them to be 2,379 in number. The eggs are very small, white with pale reddish dots, seven or eight in number, but so many as sixteen have been found. It has been suggested that when a large number are found in one nest they have been laid by more than one bird. The nest once found is seldom forgotten, it is such a marvel of beauty and ingenuity. The notes of the Long-tailed Tit are weak, but pleasing, harmonising well with the silence of the woods in which it delights. Its curious nest may be compared with that of a Continental species (*P. pendulinus*), found in the southern and eastern provinces of Europe. This nest is made in the form of a flask, hanging from a bough of willow or other aquatic tree. It is woven from the cotton-like down of the poplar or willow, with an opening in the side, and generally overhangs the water. The White-winged Tit (*P. niger*) is another beautiful member of this family. It is found in South Africa.

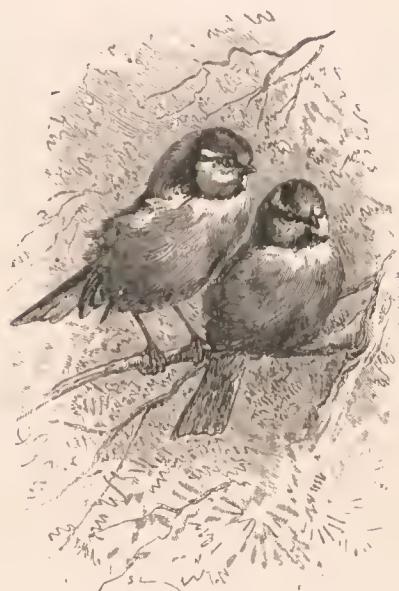
Jesse notices how fitly the nest of the Long-tailed Tit is softly lined with warm feathers; inasmuch as having a large number of young ones to provide for, the parent bird must necessarily be absent a long time, and so in default of her own warmth takes these measures to secure it for the brood.

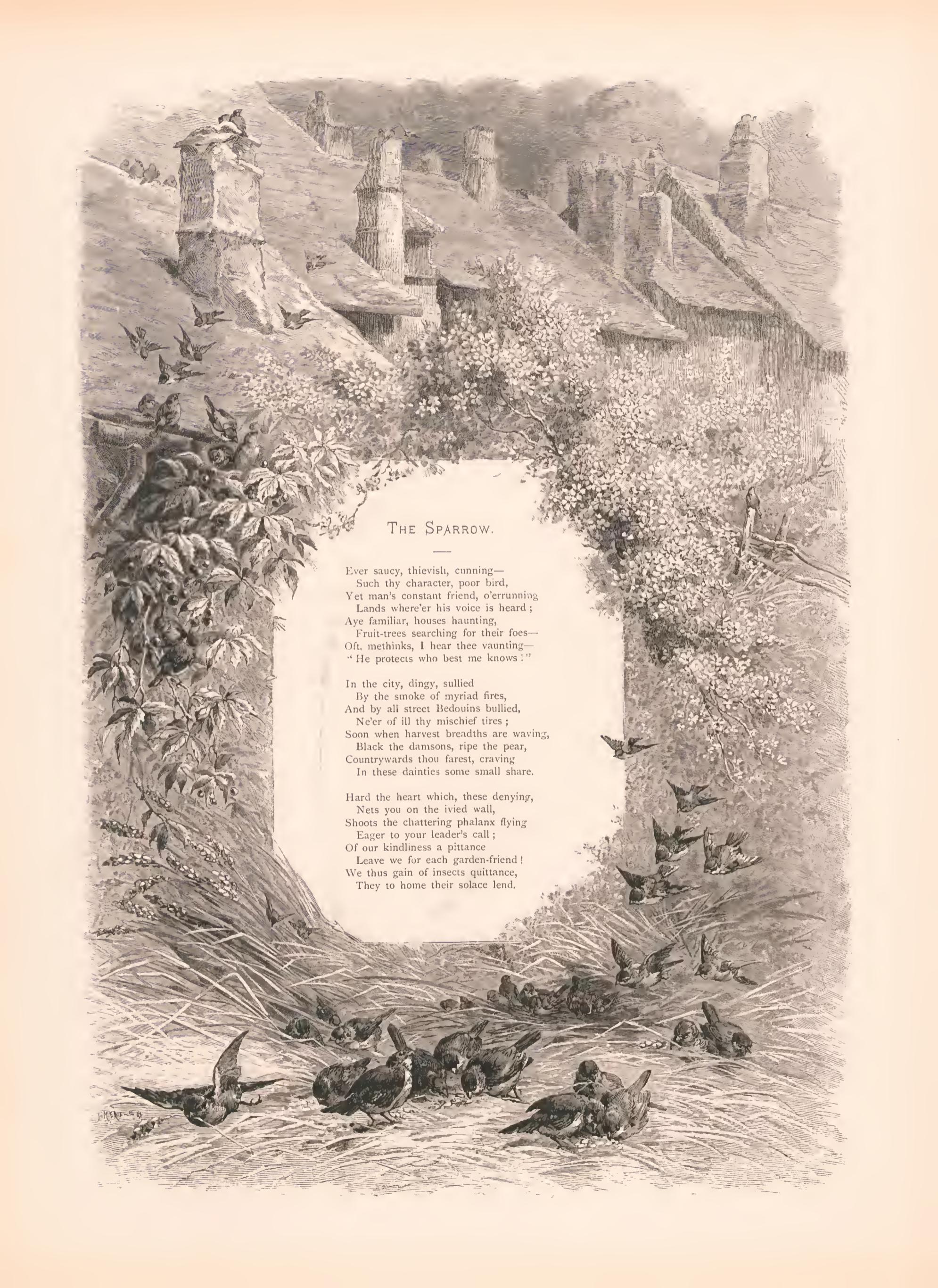
A very beautiful bird known as the Bearded Tit (*Calamophilus biarmicus*) is in reality of a different family. It seems to have prevailed along the eastern coast in the fens of Lincolnshire and the Norfolk Broads until draining became common, but is now only found, and that sparsely, in the latter locality. It is abundant in similar places in Holland, and has been noticed in Albania and Southern Spain. A loose tuft of long, black, lanceolate feathers, springing from the side of the chin and throat, forms a kind of moustache to this bird. The rest of its plumage is bluish-grey and orange-brown. These birds are very sociable in their watery haunts, living on water-snails and the seeds of the reeds. Their note is like "ping, ping," briskly repeated. The nest is placed on a tuft of sedges or reeds near the ground, and holds from four to six eggs, white dashed with red spots.

The Tomtit is not a bird greatly favoured by the poets, nor does much folk-lore seem to attach to it. We have, however, lately heard of a Shropshire

village where the Blue Tit is a plague to the bees on their first leaving the hives in early spring, destroying them without mercy. In consequence, it is shot down by the cottagers, and if it has not at present, will ere long acquire a bad name with countrymen. Professor Newton suggests that this is an individual peculiarity of the species, but in the village above named it seems to recur annually, in spite of the destruction of many of the marauders.

Mr. Harvie Brown relates in the *Zoologist* (July, 1867) that he had seen an albino Greater Tit in the woods, accompanied by many more of the same species, and much mobbed by them. The same magazine (June, 1866) records an instance of a Long-tailed Tit's nest having been found containing thirteen eggs. Nine of these belonged to the Tit, and four, which had been slightly sat upon, to a golden-crested wren. The Tits had probably forsaken the nest from some cause, and it had then been adopted by the wrens, which did not take the trouble to turn out the eggs of the original owners. In connection with the Greater Tit's murderous habits, the following curious story may be added:—"Early in the morning of the 13th of November, 1870, I noticed a Greater Titmouse (*P. major*) fly down from the house-top with a living bat in his beak, and to our astonishment he set to work pecking at it, evidently for the purpose of killing it, which eventually he did, the bat making only a weak resistance by gently flapping its wings. The bird then flew away with its prey to a rose-tree some ten yards off. Revisiting the spot in two hours' time, we found that its little beak had penetrated the bat's skull, and cleared its brains out" (Rev. E. C. Moor, *Zoologist*, p. 2439, January, 1871). With regard to the Crested Tit not being a native of England, Mr. Harting gives a few instances of its capture, but they were evidently stray birds.





### THE SPARROW.

Ever saucy, thievish, cunning—  
Such thy character, poor bird,  
Yet man's constant friend, o'errunning  
Lands where'er his voice is heard;  
Aye familiar, houses haunting,  
Fruit-trees searching for their foes—  
Oft, methinks, I hear thee vaunting—  
“He protects who best me knows!”

In the city, dingy, sullied  
By the smoke of myriad fires,  
And by all street Bedouins bullied,  
Ne'er of ill thy mischief tires;  
Soon when harvest breadths are waving,  
Black the damsons, ripe the pear,  
Countrywards thou farest, craving  
In these dainties some small share.

Hard the heart which, these denying,  
Nets you on the ivied wall,  
Shoots the chattering phalanx flying  
Eager to your leader's call;  
Of our kindness a pittance  
Leave we for each garden-friend!  
We thus gain of insects quittance,  
They to home their solace lend.



## THE SPARROW.

(*Passer domesticus*, L.)

FAMILIAR as most of our native finches are to all country residents, every one, townsman or rustic alike, knows the Sparrow, often, indeed, too well. He is ever the same mischievous, impudent, noisy bird wherever found, and that is almost wherever man chooses to settle. He follows human steps and frequents human habitations like the rat among quadrupeds. No city is too bustling for the Sparrow, and the dirty, smoke-stained "Jims" of London, as they are called, contrive to pass a happy existence where their unsophisticated country cousins would probably find themselves much out of place. There are, indeed, outlying farms and solitary inns in the Highlands, as well as lonely districts of Ireland, where the Sparrow is said to be seldom or never seen. But the outskirts of a farmyard, with a few rambling thatched buildings, and perhaps a garden close at hand, are particularly to the Sparrow's mind, and in such localities it may be seen in companies of several hundred, especially if threshing or harvesting operations be going on. His greed and cunning remind the spectator of the like qualities (only intensified) exhibited in the Indian crows, which will snatch meat from dishes as servants carry them from the cooking to the dining tent. The Sparrow is not so fearless as this, indeed; but, owing to his thefts among the newly-sown corn, the ripe ears, and the stacked

sheaves, his incursions upon the kitchen-garden, his nests, which fill up spouts and pipes, and the havoc wrought in thatched roofs by his tunnels, he is the subject of deep hatred to most farmers. He has a good side to his character, indeed, the quantity of grubs and noxious insects that he devours during winter and early spring being very great; but country folks are profoundly prejudiced, and too often wage summary war upon him whenever advantage can be taken of his incaution. Sparrow clubs, however, and money paid from the rates to exterminate Sparrows, are now almost everywhere things of the past; but agricultural depression, we fear, rather than sounder ornithological views, has led to this improvement. The unfortunate starling is still too often shot because he seeks a sheltered corner in the dovecote, and while this continues, it is somewhat premature of the British farmer to boast of his enlightened views with respect to Sparrows.

The Sparrow belongs to the great family of finches, remarkable for the shortness, thickness, and powerful structure of the beak, the upper and lower mandibles being for the most part equally thick, so that it becomes a formidable tool with which to split open seeds, the kernels of stone-fruit, and the like. In the Sparrow, the beak is somewhat arched above, and the lower mandible is rather smaller than the upper. In the male the crown and back of the head are dark bluish ash; the throat, a line by the eyes, and the front of the neck are black; above the eyes is a band of reddish-brown slightly mixed with white feathers. The upper plumage is dark brown edged with reddish-brown, and there is a single transverse white bar on the wing. The under parts are greyish white. In the female the head, neck, and breast are ash-brown and the rest of the plumage is less bright, and the bird is altogether more subdued in its demeanour. The length of a Sparrow is nearly six inches. It pairs early in the year, and hatches several broods during the fine weather, if undisturbed. The quarrels, chirpings, and scufflings of the old cock birds are well known, and all must have noticed how on a sudden, from apparently the most violent quarrel, the birds separate and fly off to their mates without any visible reason, much as Virgil's bees ceased fighting, *pulveris exigui jactu*. The nest is placed in any gutter, ruinous chimney, or eave which will afford shelter; a broken pot hung against a wall will attract them. An ivy-covered wall is a favourite locality for a colony, and much do the birds annoy the inmates of bedrooms adjoining it by their chirping and noise at early dawn through the summer months. Occasionally they build in trees, but only in those near houses. The nest is then very large and dome-shaped, like a bag of straw lined with feathers, scraps of string, and worsted. But the bird varies the shape and size of its nest according

to the situation it chooses, hay and straw being little used, for instance, under eaves, but feathers seeming indispensable in every case. The bird is very fond of warmth, and Professor Newton states that it has been seen collecting feathers in winter and carrying them to the hole in which it was in the habit of roosting with its fellows. The eggs are usually five or six in number, and the bird has two or three sets in a season. They are whitish, coloured with more or less dark spots, streaks, and blotches. When immunity from persecution is granted them, Sparrows speedily become a plague, and we have at times, when persecuted beyond endurance, taken nearly a hundred eggs and young ones from the ivy-covered walls of the house, together with two wheelbarrow-loads of straw and feathers. In a week or two, however, there were apparently as many nests as ever. Such a colony is very capricious. Some years its numbers are very full, at others hardly any will frequent their old haunts. Of late years, owing, we believe, to the hard winters, there have been very few Sparrows in North Lincolnshire, and in the summer of 1878 one miserable old cock bird formed the sole representative for some weeks of the community which with us was wont to be so populous and noisy.

Jesse gives a good character to the Sparrow. In order to be fair we quote his words:—"Many observant persons are now aware, that in places where Sparrows have been destroyed, some sorts of fruit-trees have been stripped of their leaves by caterpillars. I am the more anxious to prove the utility of Sparrows, because they are birds possessed of a very kindly nature, living in great habits of sociability with each other. Several instances have been related to me of their having been observed feeding the young of other birds which have been in a state of captivity; and there is one well-attested anecdote of a Sparrow, which, having been caught by the leg by a piece of worsted, from which it could not extricate itself, was tended and fed by its congeners through a whole winter. This kindness of disposition does not appear to have escaped the notice of farming-men, who nevertheless, as I observed before, are great enemies to the whole race. I heard one particular instance of a farmer's servant having placed a nest of young Sparrows in a trap-cage, and having caught forty old birds, all coming with food in their mouths to feed the helpless young."\* He states, too, that it has been calculated that a pair of Sparrows, while feeding their young, destroy above 3,300 caterpillars a week, besides other insects.

Though seldom seen far from man's abode, the Sparrows in autumn collect into flocks—especially, it is said, the London Sparrows—and resort to the cornfields

\* "Gleanings in Natural History," p. 291.

for their share of harvest. As soon as the grain is stacked these flocks return to their old haunts.

In Norway the Sparrow occurs locally along the coast to the Loffodens and Alten. In Sweden, too, and the northern parts of Russia it is common. In Asia it has a very wide range, from Yarkand to Siam and Ceylon. In the Nile valley, also, it resides, as well as in Algeria and Morocco, though not universally distributed. Of recent years it has been imported to North America, Bermuda and Cuba, the Mauritius, Australia and New Zealand. "In most of these places," says Professor Newton, "it will, of course, oust some of the indigenous species, and will most probably in a few years become an intolerable nuisance."

The colours of this bird are somewhat variable. Albinoes are far from uncommon. We have seen one flying about in the outskirts of a populous town.

White observes that "House Sparrows build under eaves in the spring; as the weather becomes hotter they get out for coolness, and nest in plum-trees and apple-trees. These birds have been known sometimes to build in rooks' nests, and sometimes in the forks of boughs under rooks' nests." In our own garden for two seasons a magpie built its nest in a sycamore; in the third year a wood-pigeon took possession of the nest, and on ascending we found in it one egg. Under the nest about a wheelbarrow-load of sticks, straws, &c., had accumulated, brought by the successive tenants, and Sparrows had seized upon this for a colony. One nest we found with five eggs in it, a second had four, the third one, and a fourth was ready for eggs. This is a regular habit of the Spanish Sparrow (*P. Hispaniolensis*). It breeds in colonies in the foundations of the nests of eagles and other large raptorial birds.

A congener which is very liable to be mistaken for the House Sparrow, and is common enough throughout England, but in smaller colonies than the other, is the Tree Sparrow (*P. montanus*). Professor Newton says that their note will at once distinguish the birds; and both sexes are very nearly alike amongst the Tree Sparrows, whereas they are well marked in the House Sparrows. The Tree Sparrow, too, may be known by its reddish-brown crown, the black patch on the sides of its neck, and its doubly-barred wings. It generally prefers trees growing in the open country to those near the abodes of man, but very frequently builds in tiled roofs, the thatch of barns, and the like. Mr. Cordeaux says that he has sometimes seen in Lincolnshire five or six hundred of these birds together. We, too, have noticed them in companies. It has recently been ascertained that a large number





of these birds come over from the Continent every autumn to join our natives, especially on the eastern coast. The common call-note of the Tree Sparrow is a chirp, somewhat shriller than that of the House Sparrow. Mr. Blyth says that the cock bird has a proper song of its own, "consisting of a number of these chirps, intermixed with some pleasing notes, delivered in a continuous unbroken strain, sometimes for many minutes together; very loudly, and having a characteristic sparrow tone throughout." The Tree Sparrow has not been recorded as breeding in Cornwall, Devon, Wilts, Hants, Surrey, Herts, Middlesex, Bedford, Monmouth, Worcester, Westmoreland, and Cumberland. It has not been known to breed in Wales, and in Scotland is but thinly scattered here and there. We have found its nests abundantly in Notts. It extends across Siberia to Japan. Throughout China and its chief islands it has been observed to take the place of the House Sparrow, inhabiting the towns, "and behaving," says Professor Newton, "with the careless effrontery generally considered to be the peculiar characteristic of that species."

Our old poets nicknamed the Sparrow "Philip," just as the redbreast is called "Robin." The Roman poet Catullus wrote two playful poems to his love Lesbia's Sparrow which show the name Philip comes from "Pip" or "Phip," an imitation of the Sparrow's chirp; and so Sir Philip Sydney writes on a Sparrow:—

"Leave that, Sir Phip, lest offe your necke be wrong." \*

Chaucer speaks of our bird as

"The Sparrow, Venus' son,"

this bird having been sacred to that goddess. Bede tells a curious apologue about a Sparrow at the conversion of King Edwin ("Ecclesiastical History," ii., cap. 13), which has led to one of Wordsworth's best-known sonnets:—

"Man's life is like a Sparrow, mighty king!  
That—while at banquet with your chiefs you sit  
Housed near a blazing fire—is seen to flit  
Safe from the wintry tempest. Fluttering,  
Here did it enter; there, on hasty wing  
Flies out, and passes on from cold to cold;  
But whence it came, we know not; nor behold  
Whither it goes."—(Vol. IV., p. 12, ed. 1857.)

Shakespeare has a few references to it:—

"Dismayed not this our captains?  
Yes, as Sparrows eagles!"  
*Macbeth*, i. 2.

\* Professor Newton's *Yarrell*, Vol. II., p. 90.

Cupid, too, is made in "The Tempest" (iv. 1) to

"Swear he will shoot no more,  
But play with Sparrows."

And when Cressida is waiting for her lover—

"She fetches her breath as short as a new-ta'en Sparrow."—*Troilus and Cressida*, iii. 2.

The Laureate shows that he has studied ornithology by the line in "Maud":—

"The mayfly is torn by the swallow, the Sparrow speared by the shrike."

Mariana's solitude, too, in the moated grange is intensified by the noisy chirping of this bird :—

"The Sparrow's chirrup on the roof,  
The slow clock ticking, and the sound  
Which to the wooing wind aloof  
The poplar made, did all confound  
Her sense."

Bishop Mant supplies us with two characteristic pictures of the Sparrow's nest and its roosting in a company during winter :—

"Here on the lawn, in laurustine  
Or holly, see the chaffinch twine  
With hair his moss-wove home compact.  
Here with like zeal but less exact  
Of skill, th' intrusive Sparrow weaves  
His in the spout or jutting caves."  
  
"Hark! what twitting noise is there?  
What sound of rustling through the air?  
Close lurking in the laurel boughs  
My steps a host of Sparrows rouse.  
Up from their couch at once they spring,  
Wheel off to yonder leafless trees;  
There sit they, thick as clustering bees,  
Till, past the terror, back they crowd,  
And, with tumultuous clamour loud,  
From twig to twig aspiring hop,  
And struggle for the loftiest top."

The Sparrow is rather an ill-omened bird in folk-lore. If it taps at the window when any one is seriously ill, it forebodes death. In Lancashire it shares popular obloquy together with the spink (chaffinch)—

"The spink and the Sparrow,  
Are the de'il's bow and arrow."

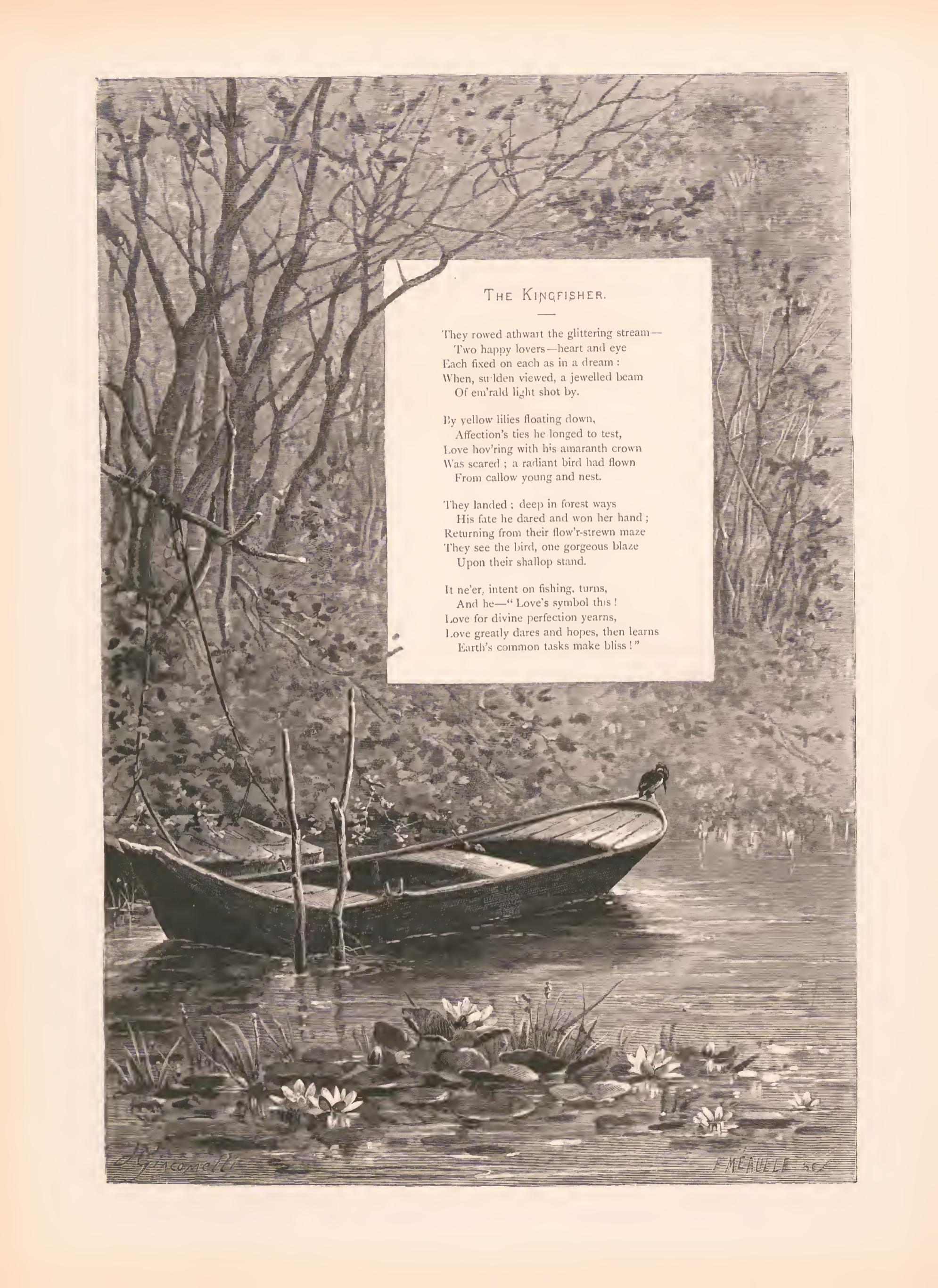
In Scotland, on the other hand, the pretty little yellow-hammer is called the "devil's bird," and a superstitious dislike to it extends as far south as Northumberland.\*

\* See Henderson's "Folk-lore of the Northern Counties," p. 123.

An old writer says that "Sparrows in the morning early, chirping and making more noise than ordinary they use to do, foretell rain or wind."\* Aubrey tells a marvellous story of a Sparrow which pecked for many days at the window of one Major John Morgan of Wells, who lay ill of fever at Broad Chalk. He heads this "An omen;" and the reader naturally expects a fatal ending. But the sick man recovered, and nothing came of it. Perhaps it is this circumstance, however, which staggered that credulous writer. The wonder is, seeing what a bad character attaches to the Sparrow for his daily misdemeanours, that folk-lore has not painted him in much darker colours. Shakespeare, with his knowledge of the Bible, has not forgotten that "there's a special Providence in the fall of a Sparrow" ("Hamlet," v. 2); and the Psalmist's "Sparrow upon the house-top" has doubtless procured some consideration for this bird. In Cornwall, however, one of the most cruel of customs was at times perpetrated upon the Sparrow by the miners. This was called "Sparrow-mumbling," and consisted in a live Sparrow being fastened with a cord to the teeth of the performer, who was expected to "mumble" off the feathers of the unfortunate bird with his lips alone, until it was plucked quite bare, without any help from his fingers or hands. This custom is alluded to in 1614, and seems to have lingered until recent years. Public opinion would now never tolerate such cruelty. (See "Notes and Queries," 4th Series, x. 185.)

\* Brand, Vol. III., 104.





### THE KINGFISHER.

They rowed athwart the glittering stream—  
Two happy lovers—heart and eye  
Each fixed on each as in a dream :  
When, sudden viewed, a jewelled beam  
Of em'rald light shot by.

By yellow lilies floating down,  
Affection's ties he longed to test,  
Love hov'ring with his amaranth crown  
Was scared ; a radiant bird had flown  
From callow young and nest.

They landed ; deep in forest ways  
His fate he dared and won her hand ;  
Returning from their flow'r-strewn maze  
They see the bird, one gorgeous blaze  
Upon their shallop stand.

It ne'er, intent on fishing, turns,  
And he—"Love's symbol this !  
Love for divine perfection yearns,  
Love greatly dares and hopes, then learns  
Earth's common tasks make bliss !"



## THE KINGFISHER.

(*Alcedo ispida*, L.)



If not the most graceful, the Kingfisher is undoubtedly the most gorgeously coloured of British birds. It belongs to a large family, chiefly natives of Asia and Africa, all more or less celebrated for their beautiful plumage. The chief characteristics of these consist in a long, straight, quadrangular-pointed bill, legs with short tarsi (shanks), feet with three toes in front and one behind, those in front curiously united to each other, the middle toe to the external one up to the third joint and to the internal one up to the first. At first sight this seems a rudimentary and awkward foot, unsuited for most ordinary purposes. But Mr. Swainson has well pointed out that it is exactly suited to the economy of the bird, which never perches save upon small slender branches, and does not require to walk upon the ground. The same ornithologist connects the Kingfisher with the bee-eaters, and contrasts the

latter, together with the goat-suckers and swallows, which possess powerful wings for long and sustained flight, with the Kingfisher, whose habits are entirely different. All the members of this family "are sedentary, watching for their food from a fixed station, which they only quit as soon as their prey approaches

sufficiently near to come within the sweep of their wings. If unsuccessful in their first attack, they do not pursue their game, but return again to their post, and patiently wait for another luckless straggler. If their first attack is successful, they return with their victim to the same station, and then proceed to swallow it."

Among the more marked members of the Kingfisher family may be named the well-known Laughing Jackass of Australia and the Sacred Kingfisher of Otaheite, which lives on the insects attracted by the honeyed blossoms of the cocoa-nut. It frequents the cocoa-nut trees, and is some eight inches long, with a crest like a hood of brownish-green feathers, and throat, breast, and all the upper part of the body pure white. The wings are bluish-green, while brown and chestnut predominate in the rest of its plumage. The Giant Kingfisher of Senegal is another fine specimen of the family, but is modestly dressed in black and white, with a red neck and breast. It is far outshone in brilliancy of plumage by the *Tanysiptera dea* of India. The feathers of this bird are sky-blue and white, and two long blue feathers, with white club-shaped ends, depend from its tail. The Swallow-tailed Kingfisher is another and still more gorgeous bird, found in Surinam. Its colour is golden-green, with a violet-brown head, and throat, neck, and lesser wing-coverts white. It is sometimes known as the Paradise Jacamar. Our own Kingfisher may be compared not disadvantageously even with these Oriental birds. Its head and wing-coverts are bluish-green spotted with azure-blue, its back is also of this latter colour; under and behind the eye is a reddish band passing into white, and beneath it another band of azure-green. Its wings and tail are azure-blue, throat white, under plumage orange-red. It is about seven and a half inches long; and as the rambler by some secluded brook catches a glimpse of it darting down a reach at his approach, it glitters and flashes in beautifully iridescent shades of emerald and azure where the sunshine falls on it. On such an occasion it is the only bird that exhibits some show of tropical splendour under our own grey skies. Its beauty, however, has too often proved its destruction; and the Kingfisher, though generally diffused, save in the northern parts of Scotland (it has been found, however, in Skye), is nowhere a common bird. It frequents running streams for the most part, especially those overhung with trees and bushes, but is occasionally found on large ponds or pieces of water. In winter it migrates to the coast. The female resembles the male, but her bill is shorter and her prevailing colour green rather than blue. Small fish, such as sticklebacks and minnows, form the chief food of the Kingfisher, but it condescends to eat fish-spawn, slugs, and leeches. Its usual mode of fishing is to sit as immovable on some overhanging twig as the heron stands at the brink of a stream,

and to dash at any incautious fish which swims under it. If secured, the fish is sometimes beaten to death against a stone or rail and then swallowed head foremost, the bones, &c., being cast up in the form of pellets, as with the hawks. The Kingfisher possesses no song, but when on the wing utters a shrill piping. The young, however, are very noisy, and when fully fledged, and the nest is abandoned, sit upon some branch while the parents fish for them. As the old ones approach they become very clamorous.

The flight of the bird is very swift, in an undeviating straight line, generally over water, and not very high above it, something after the manner of another aquatic bird, the dipper. Its nesting arrangements are very simple. Taking possession of any suitable hole in the bank—often a water-rat's run—it deposits its eggs on a saucer-like nest formed of the bones which, as we have said, it casts up. No moss or bents are employed about it, the bird not being used to settle on the ground. Montagu says that the old birds frequent this hole for some time before the eggs are laid in order to secure a due deposit of bones. The eggs are seven in number, of a short oval form, and quite white and transparent. The hole and the passage to it become very foul and fetid, from the dirty habits of the old birds; but as they take care that the hole shall ascend in the bank rather than descend, these inconveniences do not give the little ones any annoyance. Mr. Rennie, the ornithologist, thinks that as the fish-bones are voided anywhere, in the passage or the hole itself, it only happens by accident that the eggs are laid on them; while Gould states that the eggs are deposited in a hole by the female without making any nest. Jesse relates that a Kingfisher's nest was discovered in the bank of a small gravel-pit. It contained six eggs, and "was composed, as usual, of small fish-bones, and was placed about two feet in the bank." It is curious to see how ornithologists differ on this point. The bird itself is not sufficiently common for its habits to be easily investigated, or else it would seem that this vexed question might speedily be settled. Every school-boy, when first trusted with a gun, shoots a Kingfisher; men who ought to know better kill this bird for the mere love of shooting any bird at all out of the common, or the vanity of having its caricature set up in a glass case (the bright tints of the bird fade after death); while the gamekeeper also wages war upon it from the same traditional feeling which prompts him to shoot that harmless bird, the water ousel. With so many foes leagued against him, it is no wonder that the Kingfisher is now a rare bird. A friend once shot a specimen of this bird, which fell on the other side of the stream. He went round a quarter of a mile to a bridge, and so crossing over procured the

bird. A stickleback an inch and a quarter long was in its mouth, and on being liberated and put into the water, it swam away seemingly uninjured. The same friend has seen this bird dive through ice in winter. As a rule, however, it is not very tolerant of frost, and has been found on its perch frozen to death.

A curious anecdote is given in the *Zoologist* respecting the death of a Kingfisher. In attempting to swallow one of its captures, a specimen of the "miller's thumb," one of the projecting spines on one side of its gill, being extended, caught under the tongue of its captor. The Kingfisher, being unable to dislodge it, fell a victim to its rapacity. Mr. Jefferies, with his close habits of observation, gives us one or two more traits of this bird:—"Though so swift, the Kingfisher is comparatively easy to shoot, because he flies as straight as an arrow; and if you can get clear of bushes or willow-pollards, he may be dropped without trouble. When disturbed the Kingfisher almost invariably flies off in one favourite direction; and this habit has often proved fatal to him, because the sportsman knows exactly which way to look, and carries his gun prepared. Wherever the Kingfisher's haunt may be, he will be found upon observation to leave it nearly always in the same direction day after day. He is, indeed, a bird with fixed habits, though apparently wandering aimlessly along the streams. Near mill-ponds is a favourite place with these birds. If he is only fishing for his own eating, he does not carry his prey farther than a clear place on the bank. A terrace made by the runs of the water-rat is a common table for him, or the path leading to the water-hatch where it is worn smooth and bare by footsteps. But he prefers to devour his fish either close to the water, or in a somewhat open place, and not too near bushes, because while thus on the ground he is not safe. While feeding his young he will carry a fish apparently as long as himself a considerable distance."\*

A relative of our bird, whose home is North America, the Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*), is related to have been twice seen in Ireland, one in October, and the other in November, 1845. These birds may have been driven across the Atlantic by stress of weather, or, which is more likely, escaped from some aviary.

The mythology and poetry of Kingfishers are closely connected. As the bird is songless, it has not attracted the attention of poets for its own sake. The old Greek myth was that Halcyone was a daughter of the wind god, Æolus; she married Ceyx, who was unfortunately drowned. When Halcyone found his dead body washed on the sea-shore, she threw herself into the waves, and was, together with her husband, changed into the birds, called Halcyons or Kingfishers. While

\* "Wild Life in a Southern County."



J. C. Greenall

F. MEAUX



they build and sit on their nests they keep the seas calm for the space of seven, eleven, or fourteen days during the winter, hence known as "Halcyon days." So Pliny writes (we quote from Holland's translation):—"The Halcyones are of great name and much marked. The very seas and they that saile thereupon know well when they sit and breed. This bird so notable, is little bigger than a sparrow; for the more part of her pennage, blue, intermingled yet among with white and purple feathers, having a thin small neck and long withall. They lay and sit about mid-winter when daies be shortest; and the time whiles they are broodie is called the Halcyon daies, for during that season the sea is calm and navigable, especially on the coast of Sicilie." Milton makes a beautiful use of this notion in his Ode on the "Nativity"—

"But peaceful was the night,  
Wherein the Prince of Light  
His reign of peace upon the earth began;  
The winds with wonder whist  
Smoothly the waters kist,  
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,  
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,  
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave."

An old English poet called Wild uses the same idea—

"The peaceful Kingfishers are met together  
About the decks and prophesie calm weather."

And Joan of Arc (in "Henry VI," Part I.) says—

"Expect St. Martin's summer, Halcyon days."

To return, however, to Pliny's folk-lore, the Halcyon's nest is, he tells us, about the size of a tennis-ball, with a narrow mouth; it cannot be cut open with iron, but must be broken by a violent blow, being composed of the dry foam of the sea. Men are at a loss, however, he adds, to see how it can be put together, and some think it is made of sharpened fish-bones, inasmuch as the old birds live on fish. These fables are curious examples of the vice which runs through so much of the ancients' natural history. Hearsay and fancy are prominent in it. Even such a man as Pliny did not take the trouble to look at a Kingfisher's nest for himself. But whatever the nest was made of, under the name of *Halcyoneum* it was endowed with medicinal powers of great virtue. There are four varieties of this supposed Halcyoneum, Pliny resumes, found in the sea. Could he have been thinking of spermaceti? It was useful in skin diseases and for injuries of the eye. Sir

Thomas Browne gives us the mediæval folk-lore of the Kingfisher—"That a Kingfisher hanged by the bill sheweth in what quarter the wind is by an occult and secret propriety, converting the breast to that point of the horizon from whence the wind doth blow, is a received opinion, and very strange; introducing natural weather-cocks and extending magnetical positions as far as animal natures. A conceit supported chiefly by present practice, yet not made out by reason or experience" ("Vulgar Errors," III. x.). He made the experiment, but found that when thus suspended, Kingfishers had "a casual station, and that they rested irregularly upon conversion." The notion pleased poets, however, and Marlowe makes a character say—

"But now how stands the wind?  
Into what corner peers my Halcyon's bill?  
Ha! to the East? yes."

Shakespeare, too, puts into Kent's mouth ("King Lear," ii. 2)—

"Such smiling rogues as these  
Reneg, affirm, and turn their Halcyon beaks  
With every gale and vary of their masters."

In recent years a Kingfisher has been seen hanging from the beam of a cottage as a vane to show the direction of the wind. Near Southampton a superstition exists (or used to do) that a dead Kingfisher suspended by the bill will turn its breast according to the ebb and flow of the tide. "It was also a custom of old," once more to quote Sir Thomas Browne, "to keep these birds in chests upon opinion that they prevented moths. Whether it were not first hanged up in rooms to such effects is not beyond all doubt. But the eldest custom of hanging up these birds was founded upon a tradition that they would renew their feathers every year, as though they were alive. In expectation whereof four hundred years ago Albertus Magnus was deceived." The bird was also supposed to be a protection against thunder, to increase hidden treasure, and to bestow grace and beauty on the person who carried it. What with all these recommendations, and with the cruel custom prevalent a few years ago when birds' plumes, stuck in a lady's hat, were thought to enhance her charms, it is perhaps a matter of small wonder that the Kingfisher is now anything but common in England.

Many authors have loved to dwell upon the beautiful scenes associated with the Kingfisher. Thus Browning—

"The river pushes  
Its gentle way through straggling rushes,  
Where the glossy Kingfisher

Flutters when noon-heats are near,  
 Glad the shelving banks to shun,  
 Red and steaming in the sun,  
 Where the shrew-mouse with pale throat  
 Burrows, and the speckled stoat."

*Paracelsus.*

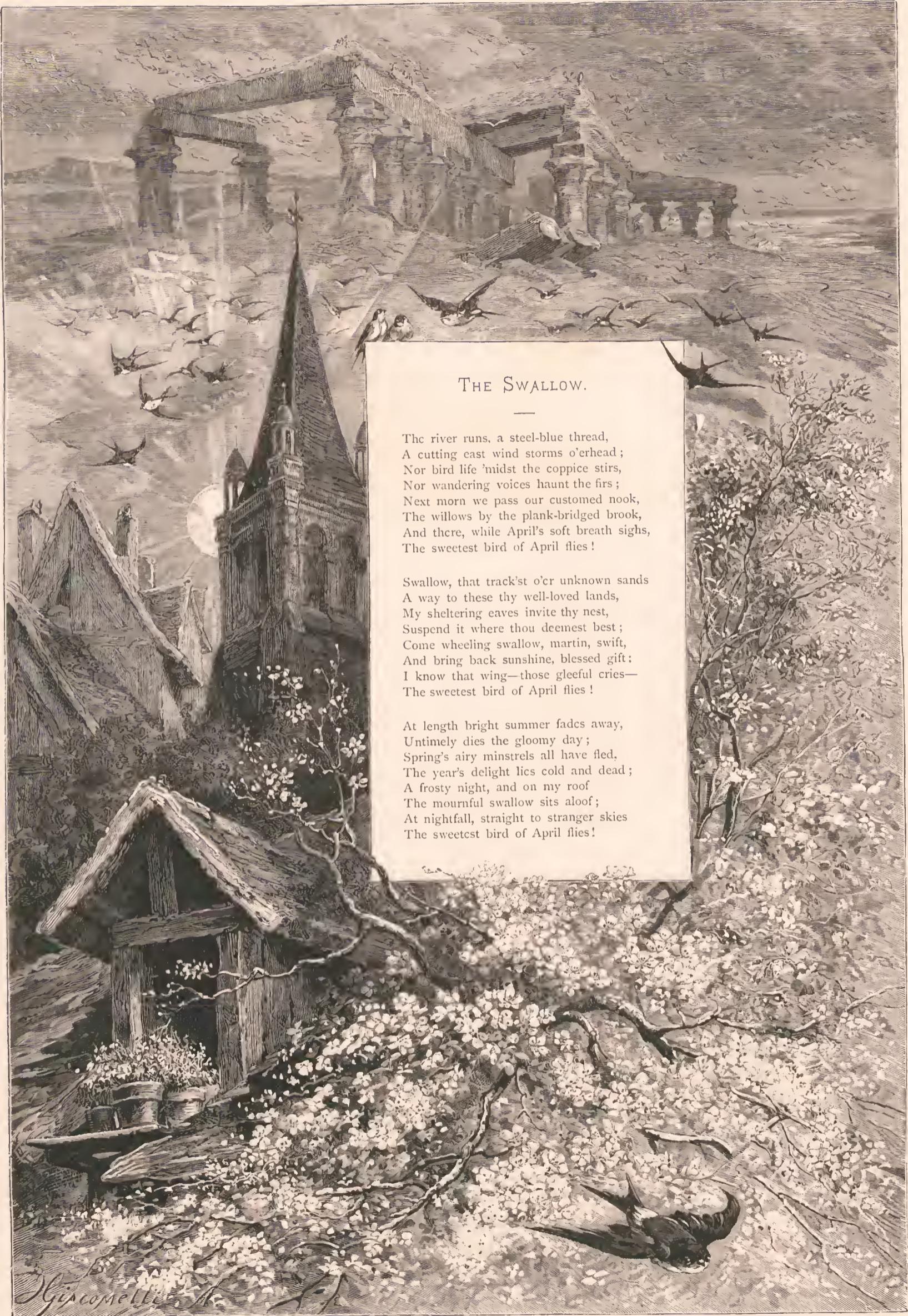
And Broderip, in speaking of an angler's bird companions, the summer snipes and the swift, darting by him like

"An arrow from a Tartar's bow,"

introduces the Kingfisher with a striking phrase to describe its flight; as exact as poetical—it "shoots by like a meteor." Mr. Wood gives a pleasant account of the difficulty of removing this bird's nest.\* "Until Mr. Gould succeeded in removing the nest entire, no one had been able to perform such a feat, and so well-known to all bird-nesters is the difficulty of the task, that a legend was, and perhaps is still, current in various parts of England, that the authorities of the British Museum had offered a reward of £100 to any one who would deposit in their collection a perfect nest of the Kingfisher. The chief difficulty was, of course, to prevent the earth from falling into the nest and becoming mixed with the delicate bones of which it was composed. In order to obviate such a mishap, Mr. Gould introduced a quantity of cotton-wool into the burrow, pushing it to the extremity with a fishing-rod. He then dug down upon the nest and captured the female, who was sitting upon eight eggs. With very great care he removed the fragile nest and transferred it to the British Museum.

The Kingfishers being, as a rule, tropical birds, he who would know more of their habits and dispersion cannot do better than consult that delightful book, Wallace's "Malay Archipelago." Thus, in the Isle of Lombok, a little violet and orange species (*Ceyx rufidorsa*) "darted rapidly along like a flame of fire." In the Moluccas, again, he found no less than sixteen species, among them the most brilliantly coloured birds in existence. In New Guinea similarly were discovered sixteen species, among them "a red and blue Tanysiptera, the most beautiful of that beautiful genus." In Amboyna the same naturalist obtained a few specimens of another bird of this most beautiful family. "They belong chiefly," he adds, "to that division of the family of Kingfishers termed King-hunters, living chiefly on insects and small land molluscs which they dart down upon and pick up from the ground, just as a Kingfisher picks a fish out of the water. They are confined to a very limited area, comprising the Moluccas, New Guinea, and Northern Australia" (p. 298, ed. 1877).

\* "Homes without Hands," p. 60.



## THE SWALLOW.

The river runs, a steel-blue thread,  
A cutting east wind storms o'erhead ;  
Nor bird life 'midst the coppice stirs,  
Nor wandering voices haunt the firs ;  
Next morn we pass our customed nook,  
The willows by the plank-bridged brook,  
And thare, while April's soft breath sighs,  
The sweetest bird of April flies !

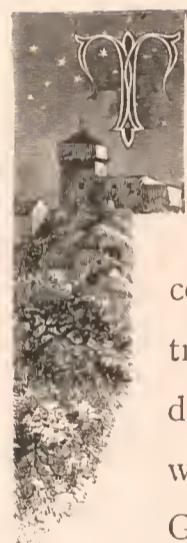
Swallow, that track'st o'er unknown sands  
A way to these thy well-loved lands,  
My sheltering eaves invite thy nest,  
Suspend it where thou deemest best ;  
Come wheeling swallow, martin, swift,  
And bring back sunshine, blessed gift :  
I know that wing—those gleeful cries—  
The sweetest bird of April flies !

At length bright summer fades away,  
Untimely dies the gloomy day ;  
Spring's airy minstrels all have fled,  
The year's delight lies cold and dead ;  
A frosty night, and on my roof  
The mournful swallow sits aloof ;  
At nightfall, straight to stranger skies  
The sweetest bird of April flies !



## THE SWALLOWS.

(*Hirundinidae.*)



THE Swallow family in England is easily recognised and gladly welcomed every spring, though the proverb that "one Swallow does not make a summer" is still as true as it was in Aristotle's time. Often rough, cold weather prevails after their arrival; but for the most part spring comes in earnest with the Swallow. Its gleeful twitterings, rapid flight, trustful association with man, and the direct benefit it is to him in destroying flies, have endeared it to all nations. The old Rhodians welcomed its return with carols. Only four members of the family frequent Great Britain—the Sand Martin, Chimney Swallow, Martin, and Swift—which generally appear in their favourite haunts in the order named; the Sand Martin being due about the end of March, while the Swift ordinarily comes in the beginning of May. Save in the north of Scotland they are generally diffused throughout the kingdom. The great lochs of Sutherlandshire present a melancholy aspect to the trout-fisher, from Swallows seldom being seen on them save in exceptional years. Mr. Harvie Brown, the historian of Sutherlandshire birds, says of the Chimney Swallow in the district of Tongue, that "half-a-dozen Swallows may almost be considered to constitute a summer." He who knows Gilbert White's "History of Selborne" will there find almost every fact which has been ascertained about the

*Hirundinidæ*, set forth, with much acumen and abundance of loving enthusiasm, for Swallows were White's favourite birds, and he was constantly occupied in noting their characteristics and habits. But he was possessed with a preconceived idea that they were able to pass the winter in a torpid state, either under the eaves of houses, in caves and the like, or else under water. Dr. Johnson characteristically enunciated the same belief:—"Swallows certainly sleep all the winter. A number of them conglobulate together, and then all in a heap throw themselves under water, and lie in the bed of a river."\* The naturalists of this century hold that this is a figment, and that all our Swallows simply migrate with autumn to warmer countries; but it is still an article of popular folk-lore. Indeed, wherever the Swallow is found, that is in most of the countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa, it is a migratory bird. Ours depart for Algeria or Egypt. The common Swift is found in Cashmere, and visits the Punjab in the rains. The Sand Martin is seen but rarely on the Ganges and the Sutlej. Our House Martin frequents the Neilgherries in small numbers, while Jerdon tells us the "Chimney Swallow is found over the whole continent of India and Ceylon, but is only a cold-weather visitant, leaving the south of India towards the end of March, but lingering in the north till May. The birds that visit India probably breed in the central and northern portions of Eastern Asia."†

Referring the reader for fuller particulars of our Swallows to White's "Selborne," it is now time to describe them specially, beginning with the little Sand Martin (*Hirundo riparia*). White gives from March 21 to April 12 as the date of its arrival. We have never noted it before March 29, and certainly the later date is the more usual one. Any one walking by a river or crossing a bridge about that time may expect to see two or three Sand Martins blown about overhead in the spring breeze, but gallantly holding their own, the first pioneers of the advancing multitudes which will course up and down the stream in May. It is the smallest of our Swallows, being only five inches long. All its upper plumage and a broad bar on its breast is of a rusty mouse colour. Below it is white, and has a short forked tail. Water is the delight of this bird, which manifests a grand indifference to man. If it can find a crumbling cliff near a river, or even a sandy railway cutting or a quarry on occasion far from it, there it congregates in a colony. The old holes of past years are occupied, as of right, by the elder birds, while those of last year's broods betake themselves to excavate new burrows for themselves, generally at a sufficient height to baffle boys and cats. Their claws are sharp,

\* Boswell's Johnson, ii., p. 56, ed. 1816.

† "Birds of India," Vol. II., Part I., p. 96.

their beaks short, strong, and pointed. Mr. Johns gives an excellent account of their procedure. "Grasping the perpendicular surface of the bank with their claws, and steadying themselves by means of their tails, they commence operations by pricking a small hole with their bills. This hole they gradually enlarge by moving round and round, and edging off the sand with the side of their bills, which they keep shut. Their progress is slow at first, but after they have made room to stand on the excavation they proceed rapidly, still working with their bills, and carefully pushing out the loosened sand with their feet." The male and then the female take it by turns to dig. The work is performed only in the mornings, and lasts several days. At length a burrow from a few inches to three feet long, slightly running upwards, to prevent water lodging in it, is made, and five or six pure white eggs laid on dried grass and feathers at its extremity. When not occupied in these labours or in sitting, the birds spend all their time in sociable parties, often in company with Martins, Chimney Swallows, and even Swifts, in hawking up and down the streams; often flying for this purpose many miles from home. In old days we have seen so-called sportsmen from Nottingham shooting Swallows as they careered up and down the Trent. Fortunately these birds are now protected during the breeding season by law, and hard-hearted must he be who can shoot at other times birds so beautiful, so interesting, so perfectly harmless, and so exceedingly useful to man.

The Chimney Swallow (*H. rustica*) is generally our next visitor, coming from March 26 to April 20, says White. We should say from the 12th to the 20th of April is nearer the date, at all events in the midland counties. This is the largest of our true Swallows, and is a beautiful bird if it be watched sunning itself on the roof. Its forehead and breast are chestnut-brown; the upper plumage, sides of the neck, and a bar across the breast are black, with violet-like reflections, lower plumage dull reddish white, tail very long and forked. The female is rather more dull in her colours and whiter in the under feathers. This species is, like the next, strongly attached to man, and chooses a chimney, an outhouse, the belfry of a church, the shaft of a deserted mine, or any other dark and dry place, for its nest, which is made of mud and straw, is rather shallow, lined with feathers, and generally abounding in fleas. The first laying of four or five eggs, white, spotted with reddish-brown, takes place in May, but they have two or three broods in the season. This is the bird so frequently seen sweeping over our lawns, and no prettier rustic sight can be conceived than the tender solicitude of the parents in feeding their young ones. The latter sit on the roof of a house or on a

neighbouring tree, while the old ones, with much twittering and many a graceful wheel, circle round and supply them with what they have captured. We once saw such a family party sitting on the topmost twigs of an apple-tree in September, their white breasts and iridescent necks presenting a beautiful contrast to the ruddy apples round them.

Soon after the Swallow, perhaps between the middle and end of April, the Martin (*H. urbica*) makes its appearance. It is midway in size between the birds just noticed, but besides this, is so characteristically marked that it cannot be mistaken. The head and upper plumage, as with the Swallow, are black with violet iridescence, but the lower part of the back over the tail and all the lower parts are pure white. Its feet and toes, too, are covered with downy feathers, and the tail is of moderate length, forked. By the white patch alone over the tail the bird is easily distinguishable. This bird generally builds under the eaves of a house or outbuilding, flies with the Swallow, and has much the same habits. The nest is built of mud and straw, lined with dry stems of grass and feathers. The eggs are pure white. We have seen a Martin so late as November 16, hawking in the cold sunshine for flies. White writes:—"One of my neighbours on November 26 saw a Martin in a sheltered bottom; the sun shone warm, and the bird was hawking briskly after flies." It is amusing to read his conclusion in the light of modern ornithology:—"I am now perfectly satisfied that they do not all leave this island in the winter" (Letter 21). It is to the Martin that Shakespeare has written some of his best-known verses, which we may trust have gone far with all lovers of poetry to secure a welcome for this pretty bird:—

"This guest of summer,  
The temple-haunting Martlet does approve  
By his loved mansionry that heaven's wreath  
Smells woonly here. No jutty frieze,  
Buttress, nor coigne of vantage but this bird  
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle;  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed  
The air is delicate."

*Macbeth*, i. 8.

The departure of these members of the Swallow family takes place generally from about the middle to the end of October, according to the mildness of the season. They may be noticed assembling in flocks on the roof of some lofty house, on the islands in a river, or the like. Towards evening, after several days of this companionship, they at length fly off and are seen no more. Several of the later broods are frequently left behind. Only last year (1879) we saw eighteen Chimney Swallows



H. JACOMELLI

H. MÉAULLE



flying round Sidmouth on November 4. Probably these later birds perish miserably when cold weather sets in. A pair of Swallows in the same year brought up four broods, of four or five birds each time, to our knowledge. What an enormous destruction of flies was required to feed these young birds alone!

The Swift (*Cypselus apus*), though a true Swallow to all intents and purposes, possesses characteristics of its own. Whereas our other Swallows have three toes in front on each foot and one behind, the Swift's four toes are all directed forwards. Its tarsi, too, are thickly feathered. Legs, indeed, it has none, in the strict sense of the word, and so all its life is spent in the air or under the dark tiles and roofing where it loves to nest and roost. It is eight inches long, but has a spread of wings seventeen inches, which render it the swiftest and most untiring in flight not only of the Swallows but of all birds. No approximation can be formed of its flight, its movements are so rapid; but it has been estimated that it flies 276 miles in an hour. It has sooty-brown plumage, with bills and claws of black, and a dirty white mark under its chin. He must have good eyes who can detect this, however, as the bird rushes screaming past him. The unearthly habits and powerful sweep of this bird give it the name of "devilin" in Nottinghamshire. It comes to us the latest of the tribe, seldom before the first week in May, and leaves the soonest, at the end of July. All these three months the bird spends in the air, beginning very early in the morning and continuing its unwearied flight until late in the twilight; now sweeping past men and houses low down, at other times at a vast height, wheeling in circles and then again with loud harsh screams seeking the open country. It seems to care less for the neighbourhood of water than do the Swallows proper. Its nest is composed of feathers and very light substances which it can catch in the air, for it never settles on the earth, and could not rise again were it to do so. The eggs are two, or sometimes more in number, pure white. We have seen a pair building in the pipe that ran from the roof down the clerestory of a church. The birds invariably entered at the top and tumbled down the pipe, so as to emerge as invariably at the bottom, thus tumbling down a distance of sixteen or twenty feet each time they visited the nest. To White belongs the merit of having most completely studied the whole of this bird's habits, and we must once more refer to his "Selborne" for fuller particulars of its life.

The Alpine Swift, which is greyish brown above and pure white on the under plumage, has been taken and seen a good many times in England and Ireland, but is in no sense a British bird.

The Swallow, as may well be imagined, is a universal favourite with the poets. Chaucer speaks of

“The Swalowe, murderer of the bees small,”

meaning, probably, flies; for it seems certain that the Swallow will not harm bees proper. It leaves this ill character to the titmouse. The Laureate either uses the word in the wider sense or believed Virgil against the testimony of practical men, for he repeats the calumny in “The Poet’s Song”:

“The Swallow stopt as he hunted the bee.”

He adds as a pretty touch to the picture of the Sleeping Beauty’s palace:

“Roof-haunting Martins warm their eggs;  
In these, in those the life is stayed.”

Another pleasant rustic sketch of his depicts a labourer’s cottage—

“Almost to the Martin-haunted eaves  
A summer burial deep in hollyhocks.”

Thomson naturally remembers the Swallows in autumn; how

“Warned of approaching winter, gathered play  
The Swallow-people; and tossed wide around  
O’er the calm sky, in convolution swift,  
The feathered eddy floats; rejoicing once,  
Ere to their wintry slumbers they retire,  
Or rather into warmer climes conveyed,  
With other kindred birds of season, there  
They twitter cheerful, till the vernal months  
Invite them welcome back; for thronging, now  
Innumerable wings are in commotion all.”

Rogers appeals to every one in the two lines—

“The Swallow oft beneath my thatch  
Shall twitter from her clay-built nest.”

He probably had in his mind Gray’s line—

“The Swallow twittering from the straw-built shed.”

Once more Matthew Arnold brings many a happy summer day to remembrance by the few words—

“Where black-winged Swallows haunt the glittering Thames.”

These short Swallow-flights of song will serve as samples of innumerable images of beauty and peacefulness which these birds have furnished to the poets.

Folk-lore has much to say about Swallows, of which, however, we can here only allude to a tithe. Pliny states that Swallows are as incapable of being taught among birds, as mice among animals. White may have adopted his favourite theory from him, for Pliny relates that when Swallows leave they only retire to the sunny recesses of neighbouring mountains, and when found there are without feathers. They will not build at Thebes, because it has been so often taken by storm ; nor at Bizya in Thrace, remembering the ill deeds of Tereus, who was born there. A certain Cæcina, too, he tells of, who was wont to take Swallows with him on a campaign, and let them fly home, having first rubbed on them the colour which was to signify that victory had been gained. "I think 'tis not to be doubted," says Walton ("Compleat Angler," i. 1), "that Swallows have been taught to carry letters between two armies." The so-called combats, too, of Swallows and Martins, fighting against each other in the air, were thought of old to portend wars. Every one knows the value of the Swallow's flight as a familiar meteorological forecast. In the west of Scotland the Swallow is thought to have a drop of the "de'il's" blood in its veins ; it is therefore feared, and left unharmed. Its nests under a house's eaves have always and everywhere been thought lucky, but woe to the inmates, in the north of England, says Mr. Henderson ("Folk-lore," p. 48), if a Swallow tumbles down the chimney. It portends a death in the house as certainly as seeing three butterflies together. In Ireland the poor Swallow is called "the devil's bird," and it is believed that there is a certain hair on every one's head, which if a Swallow can pick off, the man is doomed to eternal perdition. Brighter thoughts, however, are connected with the Swallow if we listen to the poets :—

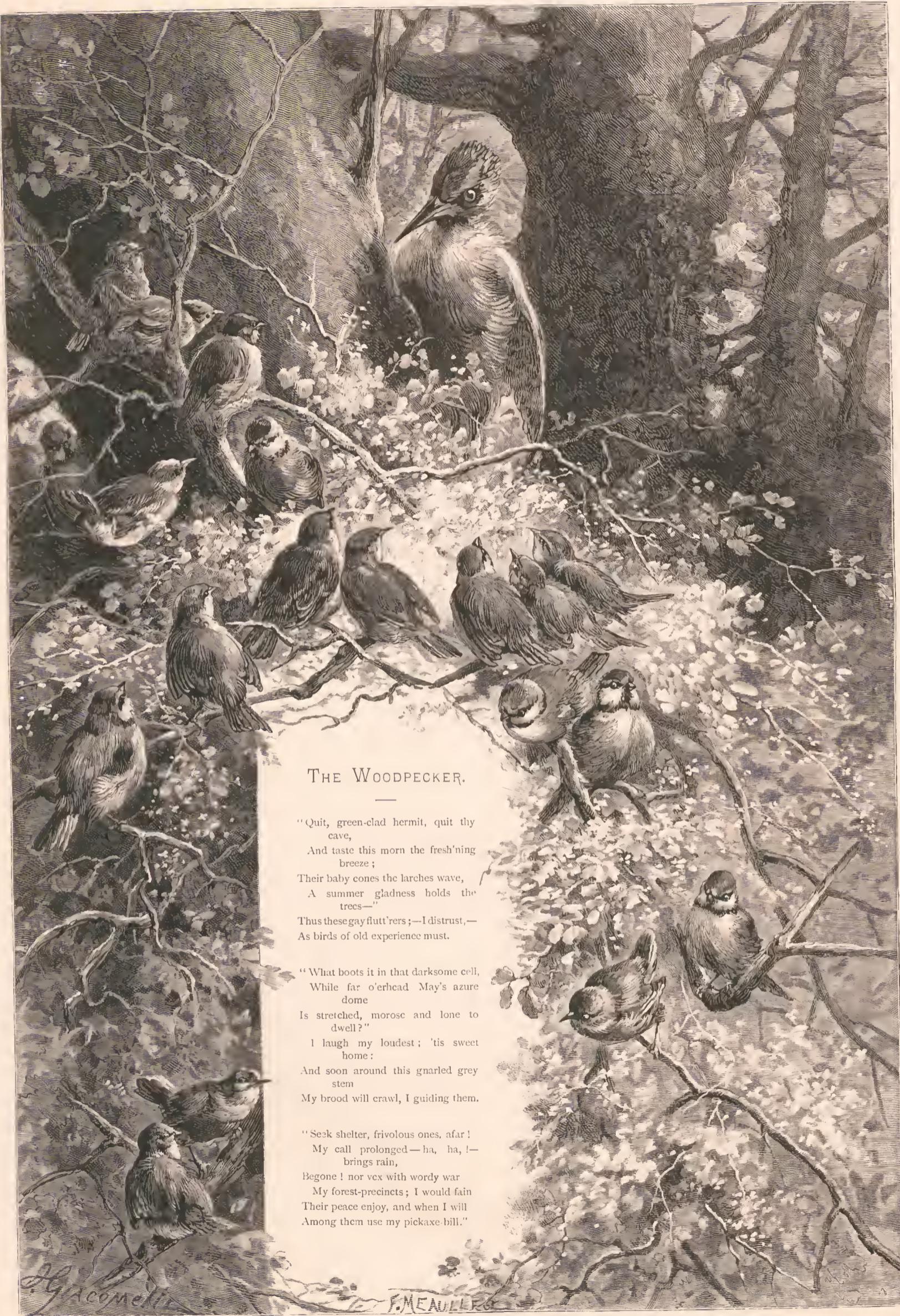
"True hope is swift, and flies on Swallow's wings."—*Richard III.*, v. 2.

Seeing, too, the virtues of the Swallow-stone, we must not, in conclusion, forget the children of Grand Pré, how—

"Oft in the barns they climbed to the populous nests on the rafters,  
Seeking with eager eyes that wondrous stone which the Swallow  
Brings from the shore of the sea to restore the sight of its fledglings;  
Lucky was he who found that stone in the nest of the Swallow!"

*Evangeline.*





### THE WOODPECKER.

"Quit, green-clad hermit, quit thy  
cave,  
And taste this morn the fresh'ning  
breeze ;  
Their baby cones the larches wave,  
A summer gladness holds the  
trees—"  
Thus these gay flutt'rers ;—I distrust,—  
As birds of old experience must.

"What boots it in that darksome cell,  
While far o'erhead May's azure  
dome  
Is stretched, morose and lone to  
dwell ?"  
I laugh my loudest ; 'tis sweet  
home :  
And soon around this gnarled grey  
stem  
My brood will crawl, I guiding them.

"Seek shelter, frivolous ones, afar !  
My call prolonged—ha, ha, !—  
brings rain,  
Begone ! nor vex with wordy war  
My forest-precincts ; I would fain  
Their peace enjoy, and when I will  
Among them use my pickaxe-bill."

J. G. COMELLIN

F. MEAULE



## THE WOODPECKERS.

(*Picidae*.)



THESE birds are familiar representatives of the third Linnæan order *Scansores* or Climbers, and are well known to any one who has lived in a well-wooded district. He must have noticed the Green Woodpecker, and heard its laughing cry, even if he is not acquainted with the other British members of the family. The characteristics of the Woodpeckers are strongly marked. The bill is stout and wedge-shaped, with a slightly convex back. No more perfect instrument could be devised for the work it has to perform upon the bark of trees, stripping it off, and penetrating the wood. It is furnished also with regular angles, and in one European species is nearly of the colour and consistence of ivory. Inside is a tongue of remarkable construction. It is worm-like, barbed at the point, and capable of being protruded to a great length. These are manifestly most necessary qualities to the functions it has to perform in destroying insect life. More than this, too, it is lubricated by a glutinous secretion abundantly furnished from two large glands situated behind the angles of the lower jaw. It may be advantageously compared with the same organ in the humming-birds. The feet are unusually strong, the claws broad and hooked, and the toes placed in pairs, two behind and two in front. Yet another singular provision is made for its

economy, inasmuch as the tail-feathers are very hard, and terminate in points, so as when pressed against the bark to assist the bird in climbing or maintaining its place on a tree. Yarrell points out a further peculiarity in the Woodpecker's structure—the small-sized keel of its breast-bone. The advantage of a narrow shallow keel is immediately apparent on looking at a representation of the skeleton in a climbing position. The low keel, allowing the bird to place its body close to the tree, brings its centre of gravity in a perpendicular line before the points of support, and thus materially diminishes the labour of, and the strain upon, the muscles of the legs and thighs. Birds of this family are found almost all over the world, except in the Australian region, being evidently required in the order of nature wherever large forests exist. Their plumage is very varied; the young have, in some of the species, a plumage peculiar to themselves. Although the mission of the Woodpeckers is undoubtedly to clear trees of noxious insects, Mr. Darwin points out, as instances of changed habits, that in North America there are Woodpeckers which feed largely on fruit, and others with long wings which chase insects while flying. On the plains of La Plata, too, where hardly a tree grows, another Woodpecker (*Colaptes*), possessing all the essential points in the structure of the family, does not climb trees, and makes its nest in a bank; but in other wooded districts it returns to the usual tree-climbing habits of the family. As a caution to hasty inferences in the structure and colour of birds, the same naturalist acutely observes that "if Green Woodpeckers alone had existed, and we did not know that there were many black and pied kinds, I dare say that we should have thought that the green colour was a beautiful adaptation to conceal this tree-frequenting bird from its enemies." The colours of all the birds comprising this family are, however, well adapted to the shades and hues of the woodlands in which they are chiefly found.

Our Woodpeckers are four-toed, but there is a very common species (*Picus tridactylus*) inhabiting the vast forests of the north of Europe, Asia, and America which only possesses three toes. Its plumage is beautifully pied in black and white, the top of the head being, in the male, of a golden-yellow colour, but in the female silvery-white variegated with fine black streaks. Insects and their larvæ and fruit form its food. The large Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*P. principalis*), which may be regarded as the typical bird of the family, is a native of Brazil and Mexico. There are also beautiful Woodpeckers in India.

Having now given a sketch of the Woodpecker family, we can turn our attention to the British members of it. Several others have been called British, but

are now rightly expunged from the native fauna. It only contains four species, yet these are very strongly marked—the Green, the Great Black, the Greater and the Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.

The most common of these is the Green Woodpecker (*P. viridis*), which may be expected in every well-wooded district, either flying heavily across a field from one plantation to another, or uttering its mocking laugh, which rustics regard as a certain prognostic of rain. It rejoices in many names with them, such as rainbird, hewhole, awlbird, woodwall, yaffingale, and poppinjay. The feathers on the crown of this bird's head are dusky, tipped with crimson; the upper plumage is green and the under feathers greenish ash colour; the back of the head and moustaches are crimson and the face black. Thus this Woodpecker is one of our most gaily-coloured birds. In the female the head is less crimson and the moustaches black. Its length is thirteen inches. It is found throughout Europe in suitable localities; also in Africa and Egypt. Its food entirely consists of insects, its tongue being nearly six inches in length, to enable it to procure them with greater facility. When it finds an elm or ash with symptoms of decay it enlarges a cavity with its powerful beak, and lays on the rotten wood, without any appearance of a nest, four or five glossy white eggs. Ants and their eggs form a dainty to this bird, so it may be often seen on the ground attacking ant-hills. The young run on the trees before they are able to fly, and are said if captured to be easily tamed. Its method of feeding is to work upwards on a tree, generally obliquely, and when it has ascended and scrutinised the bark sufficiently it flies off to another, or descends to a lower point and again ascends. It is not a shy bird, especially in cold weather, and we have seen it working diligently on trees close to houses and frequented paths. Often it commences nidification in February, but the young do not appear until early summer. Mr. Johns exactly describes the proceedings of this bird as it searches for food. "It may be observed ascending by a series of starts the trunk of a tree, inclining now a little to the right and now to the left, disappearing now and then on the side farthest from the spectator, and again coming into view somewhat higher up. Nor is its beak idle. This is employed sometimes in dislodging the insects which lurk in the rugged bark, and sometimes in tapping the trunk in order to find out whether the wood beneath is sound or otherwise. A canker-spot found, it halts in its course, tears off piecemeal a portion of bark, and excavates the rotten wood beneath, either as far as the fault extends or as long as it can find food." He deems it in no wise a mischievous bird, but rather beneficial to the planters, from its destruction of mischievous insects, and a good guide to the woodman, as it

points out unerringly, if he will be content to learn from it, what trees are beginning to decay. Waterton explains that a small fungus often proceeds from the ash, which ripens in summer and then falls, owing to the winter's rain. The bark which it has perforated is now completely dead, and soon becomes touchwood. Insects seize upon it as a snug hiding-place, and speedily the titmouse or Woodpecker visit it, and, enlarging the hole, kill the insects and form their nests within, if the latter bird can be credited with such a superfluity.

A still larger member of this family is the Great Woodpecker (*P. martius*). This fine bird is seventeen inches long, dressed in black, with the exception of the upper part of the head, which is bright red. It is a common bird throughout the great forests of Northern Europe, extends to Persia and Asia Minor, and is even found in some parts of North and South America. Its habits are precisely similar to those of the Green Woodpecker, but in addition to insects it devours fruit, berries, and nuts with avidity. It lays two or three eggs of an ivory whiteness in the hollows of trees. In Norway it is described when on the wing as resembling a crow, and its notes consist of a hoarse loud laugh. In Germany it is very common, and is a great destroyer of trees. It has not been found as yet in Ireland, but was claimed by Sir R. Sibbald as a Scotch bird. Some have doubted whether this Woodpecker should be included amongst British birds; but a few specimens have been killed, principally in the west of England and in Yorkshire, so that we are justified in describing it here. It is so strongly-marked a bird that from this account it is hoped some observant eye may again detect it in England.

Our other two British species are the Great and the Lesser Spotted (*P. major* and *P. minor*), which are respectively nine and five inches and a half long. The former bird is black and white above, dirty white below, but the under parts by the tail and the crest are crimson. The female only differs in not possessing this crimson patch on the crown. It is less frequent in England than the Green Woodpecker, but its habits are much the same, except that it does not seem to descend to the earth in search of food. The eggs are five, white; and deposited, as with the other members of the family found in Great Britain, in a hole of a tree, but with no pretence of a nest. This bird is said to cause great havoc among orchard fruit. It makes a most curious resounding noise with its bill upon trees. This is a common spring sound in the districts which they inhabit, and may be heard at a great distance. We have heard it in Devonshire, and were at first much puzzled to find its origin. The Great Spotted Woodpecker does not seem to wander so far from its own favourite locality as does the Green Woodpecker—at least, such is our experience.



Giacomelli

E. 50



The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is much smaller than the last-named bird. Its plumage is black and white, with a dirty-whitish breast and crimson head. As with the last-mentioned bird, this patch of colour is wanting in the female. The eggs are also five in number, and of the same glossy whiteness. It possesses all the habits of its congener, but is much more scarce. The hole in which its young are hatched is occasionally excavated by it to suit its requirements. Mr. Roche says that these birds are not uncommon in Shropshire; and though usually considered very rare, it may well be that their small size causes them to escape observation. We have seen a pair of them in early spring busily working upwards from the base of a Spanish chestnut-tree near a tolerably frequented footpath in Devonshire. The legs are placed very far back, and every now and then these birds, swinging on them as on pivots, brought down their pick-axe-like bills with great force on the bark. At the same time they worked round the tree, ascending higher and higher till the eye lost them among the branches.

The poets, as might be expected, use the Woodpecker as an adjunct to sylvan scenery—as a bright spot in a picture, in short—not finding much that ministers to fancy in its lonely and somewhat morose life. Chaucer, with his intense love for nature, thus makes it one of the notable birds surrounding the god of love. First come the

“Nightingales, a full grete rout ;”

and then—

“He was all with birdis wrien (covered),  
With popingaie, with nightingale,  
With chalaundre and with Wodewale,  
With finche, with larke, and with archangel ;  
He seemid as he were an angell  
That down were come fro hevin clere.”

*Romaunt of the Rose.*

These birds are respectively the parrot (or perhaps magpie), nightingale, goldfinch, and Woodpecker. The “archangel” is the tomtit.

In a beautiful account of the great pine-forests of Ravenna Shelley employs our bird to intensify their silence.

“How calm it was! The silence there  
By such a chain was bound  
That even the busy Woodpecker  
Made stiller by her sound  
The inviolable stillness.”

And Tennyson has not forgotten the Woodpecker's laugh. Sir Tristram exclaims—

“Vows—I am woodman of the woods,  
And hear the garnet-headed Yaffingale  
Mock them!”

*The Last Tournament.*

If poetry has somewhat neglected the Woodpecker, few birds have obtained more celebrity in folk-lore. Picus was the first king of Latium, according to the legend, and was turned by the enchantress Circe into a Woodpecker. Ovid has beautifully versified this myth in the 14th Book of his “Metamorphoses.” We append Garth’s translation, which does not, however, do justice to the original.

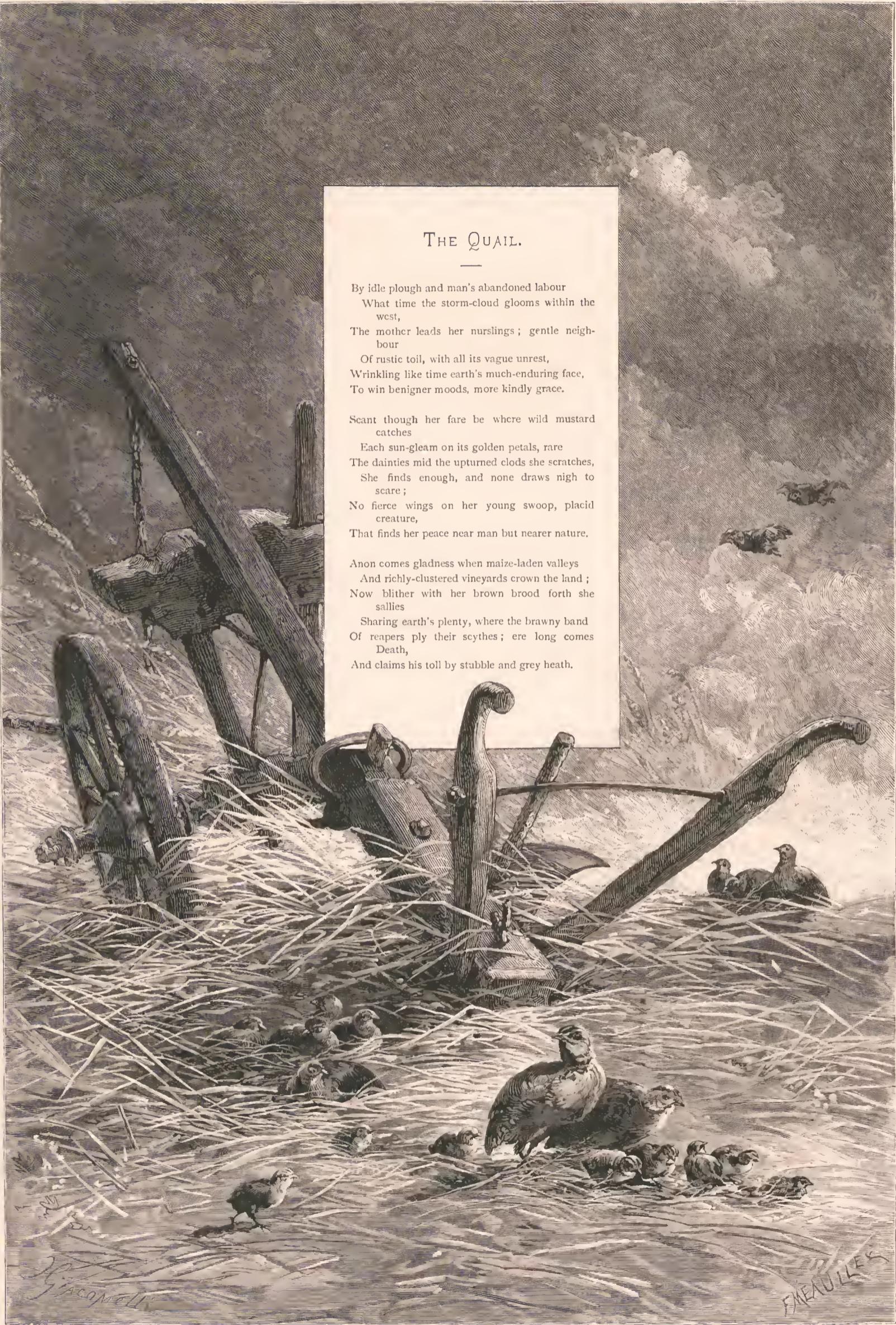
“Now thrice to east she turns, as oft to west,  
Thrice waved her wand, as oft a charm expressed.  
On the lost youth her magic pow’r she tries;  
Aloft he springs, and wonders how he flies.  
On painted plumes the woods he seeks, and still  
The monarch oak he pierces with his bill.  
Thus changed, no more o’er Latian lands he reigns;  
Of Pieus nothing but the name remains.”

The bird was highly esteemed in augury; and if any one bears about him a Woodpecker’s bill, says Pliny, he may plunder hives with impunity, as the bees will not touch him. As Picumnus, together with his brother Pilumnus, this bird was believed by the Romans to preside over young children. It is regarded in Indo-European tradition as one of the birds which brought fire from heaven to man, whereof its red crest is symbolical. In Norway the Great Black Woodpecker is called Gertrude’s bird; and a Norse tale, in which, says Kelly, the names alone are Christian and the substance of the story purely heathen, makes the bird a transformed baker. A woman called Gertrude, wearing a red mutch, refused our Lord and St. Peter once upon a time a piece of dough when they were hungry, and was as a punishment turned into a bird, condemned to seek its food between bark and bole, and never to drink save when it rained. The transformed Gertrude at this sentence flew up the chimney, and may still be seen with her red mutch on her head, but with her body all black because of the soot. She still taps and hacks at the trees for food, and whistles when rain is coming; for she is always thirsty, and then looks for a drop to cool her tongue. For the relations of these different myths the reader may be recommended to Kelly’s “Indo-European Folk-lore.” This book also explains Pliny’s marvellous story of the celebrated herb springwort, which is obtained from a Woodpecker by stopping up its nest.

A few more notes may be appended about the British *Picidæ*. The Greater Spotted Woodpecker is a regular migrant to the east coast. The Green Woodpecker is seldom, if ever, seen in the Isle of Wight. The former bird is believed by Mr. Harvie Brown to be gradually dying out in Scotland, owing to the destruction of old birch-trees, and the incursions of sparrows and starlings to take possession of the holes in which it was formerly wont to breed. A very singular notice of this bird's migration occurred in Shetland, with Mr. Saxby's account of which our chapter may fitly end :—

" Many years ago, a bird to which the name Norway Woodpecker was vaguely applied was shot in the garden at Halligarth, but as the specimen was destroyed, and no notes as to its appearance were taken, the species was unascertained until lately, when, on my showing a Great Spotted Woodpecker (*P. major*) to the captor, he instantly remarked that it was exactly like the one above mentioned. Although this species had frequently been taken in Orkney, it was not ascertained to have occurred in Shetland until September, 1861, when a steady breeze from the south-east brought a large flock of these strange visitors. I saw the first at Halligarth on the third of the month, and during the next three weeks great numbers were seen and captured in most parts of the Orkney and Shetland Islands. As the birds were doing great damage in the garden, I shot several; but it is remarkable that among these, and also among the numerous specimens brought me from various quarters, there was not one female, and that, with a single exception, all were birds of the year. The first two presented nothing unusual in appearance; but, in taking a third into my hand, I at once remarked the worn appearance of the bill, tail, and claws. I immediately suspected that this was caused by the bird having been compelled, in the scarcity of trees, to seek its food among stones and rocks; and upon opening the stomach my suspicions were confirmed by the discovery, among other insects, of several small beetles which are found only upon the hills" (Saxby's "Birds of Shetland," p. 139).





### THE QUAIL.

By idle plough and man's abandoned labour  
What time the storm-cloud glooms within the  
west,  
The mother leads her nurslings; gentle neighbour  
Of rustic toil, with all its vague unrest,  
Wrinkling like time earth's much-enduring face,  
To win beniger moods, more kindly grace.

Scant though her fare be where wild mustard  
catches  
Each sun-gleam on its golden petals, rare  
The dainties mid the upturned clods she scratches,  
She finds enough, and none draws nigh to  
scare;  
No fierce wings on her young swoop, placid  
creature,  
That finds her peace near man but nearer nature.

Anon comes gladness when maize-laden valleys  
And richly-clustered vineyards crown the land;  
Now blither with her brown brood forth she  
sallies  
Sharing earth's plenty, where the brawny band  
Of reapers ply their scythes; ere long comes  
Death,  
And claims his toll by stubble and grey heath.



## THE QUAIL.

(*Coturnix vulgaris*, L.)



ONE family in the useful order of gallinaceous birds is not only well marked, but also of the utmost interest to sportsmen—the *Tetraonidæ*, as they are called—that is, the Partridges and their allies. It consists of the Capercaillie, Black Game, Red Grouse, and Ptarmigan, best known to wanderers on the Scotch hill-sides, of the Pheasant, the Common Partridge, and the Red-Legged Partridge, all of them familiar to most lovers of the country, and of the Quail. Besides these a few rarities are included in most histories of English birds, such as the Virginian Partridge and the Andalusian Hemipode, a kind of small Quail, but well distinguished by the absence of a hind toe. Only three British examples of this bird have as yet been chronicled. In 1863, too, an extraordinary flight of

Pallas's Sand Grouse, a Central Asian bird belonging to this order, passed over England, seventy-five alone being killed in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk.\*

\* Harting's "Handbook of British Birds," p. 129.

The Quail is generally regarded as a summer migrant to Great Britain, but numbers remain during the winter, especially in Ireland. On the east of Scotland it is by no means so common as on the west, though met with in nearly all counties from Berwick to Orkney. Its nest has been found in the Outer Hebrides, in Lewis, and North Uist.\* It is far from uncommon, however, in many parts of England, being often overlooked, perhaps, from its small size. Almost every old sportsman, however, has at one time or other shot one or two of these pretty little birds. The bill is slender and convex above, curved towards the end. The bird possesses no red eyebrow, like the Grouse and Ptarmigan, and no spur on its tarsus; its tail is short, and wings rounded. The head is mottled with black and reddish-brown, with three parallel longitudinal streaks; the upper plumage is ash-brown, straw-coloured, and black; the neck reddish-brown, with a double crescent of dusky brown; breast pale brown, bill and feet yellowish-brown. The female's colours are less distinct, and she wants the double crescent on the neck. The whole length of the bird is eight inches—just the length of our common winter visitant the redwing, and rather less than that of its brother bird the thrush. The Quail proper is found only in the Old World and in Australia, and yet its geographical distribution is very extensive. No other gallinaceous bird possesses so wide a range in the Old World. It is abundant in North Africa and most parts of India and China, while the whole of the southern portions of Siberia, and every country in Europe except the extreme northernmost districts, are visited annually or permanently inhabited by it. Very many stay in the southern parts of Europe throughout the year, but their numbers are reinforced every spring by large flocks which migrate from the parched plains of Africa in search of more abundant supplies of food and congenial breeding-places. "So vast and countless," adds Gould, "are the flocks which often pass over to the islands and European shores of the Mediterranean, that a mode of wholesale slaughter is usually put in practice against them—a circumstance which no doubt tends to limit their inordinate increase;" that is, they are netted and snared wherever they appear, and furnish an abundant food-supply for France, Spain, and Portugal, and the Riviera. Not only so, but enormous numbers are also sent over to the London market, travelling alive in cages like trays, which just admit of the poor birds standing upright in them, as they would otherwise beat themselves to pieces. To give some idea of the numbers of the Quail on the Continent we extract a passage from Johns' "British Birds," which that author himself quotes from a

\* Harting's "Handbook of British Birds," p. 40.

French naturalist :—"One may get an idea of the prodigious number of victims which the simple crossing of the Mediterranean costs the species, by two well-known and often-quoted facts. The Bishop of Capri, a wretched islet scarcely a league in length, which lies at the entrance of the Bay of Naples, used to clear a net revenue of 25,000 francs a year (£1,000) by his Quails. This sum represents 150,000 Quails at the lowest computation. In certain islands of the Archipelago, and parts of the coast of the Peloponnese, the inhabitants, men and women, have no other occupation during two months of the year than that of collecting the Quails which are showered on them from heaven, picking and cleaning them, salting them, and packing them away in casks for transportation to the principal markets of the Levant; that is to say, the migration of Quails is to this part of Greece what the migration of herrings is to Holland and Scotland. The Quail-catchers arrive at the shore a fortnight in advance, and every man numbers his ground to avoid disputes. The Quail arrives in France early in May, and takes its departure towards the end of August."

With us it arrives about the same time, and departs in October; but it frequently breeds here, and we have known one come to the window opening on a lawn along with the ordinary garden birds to be fed with crumbs during a severe winter. Of the migratory birds the males, as usual, arrive first, and betray themselves by their thrice-repeated whistle. The fowler can then lure them towards his snares by a Quail-pipe for producing the note of the female. It is occasionally done by the voice, but this demands a very skilful performer.

The Quail is polygamous, and the female's nest, which is little more than a hole scratched in the ground, generally in some field of young wheat, contains in this country from six to twelve or fourteen bluish-green eggs, blotched occasionally with duller specks. On the Continent so many as eighteen or twenty have been found. When the young are hatched, the mother bird brings them up and finds food for them without any help from her mate, the bevy following her as a covey of partridges are protected and fed by the hen bird.

The Rock Quail of the Deccan is a very prettily marked species, much used by the natives for Quail fights. Its flesh is perfectly white. In America another species, the *ortyx*, replaces our familiar bird. Its best-known representative is the Virginian Quail, which is of the same size as our bird, but distinguished by a pure white chin and broad line of black which spreads over the eye and surrounds the throat. It is commonly called the Partridge in America much as its

inhabitants persist in calling a red-breasted migratory thrush which visits them a robin. Another curious and beautiful allied species is the *lophortyx* of California, remarkable for its crested head.

The Quail was well known to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who prized it much for its pugnacious habits, and found great amusement in Quail-fights, as do the Chinese at present. The Egyptians eat Quails raw, but dried, and probably salted. Lucretius grew philosophical over them, pointing out how one creature's food is another's bane, and the reverse, exemplifying the manner in which goats and Quails fatten on hellebore, which was poisonous to man. Pliny, after his wont, tells marvellous tales of their migration. They reach us, he says, before the cranes come, small though they be, and when they do come, come on the ground to us rather than through the air. As they draw near land, it is not without peril to ships; for they often light on their sails, and that in the night too, in such numbers that the ships sink under their weight. They come by certain well-known resting-places, and never fly with the south wind, as it is damp and heavy; but they like to be borne on the wings of the wind, inasmuch as they have heavy bodies for their size and small strength. Their cries on arrival tell of the extreme labour it has been; so they choose the north wind, and fly with a mother Quail to guide them. A hawk kills the first that lands. On their return they always solicit an escort, so the bird called bee-eater, the horned owl, and the ortolan fly away with them. He gives us a scrap of Roman folk-lore, too, in saying people did not eat them because they were supposed to be subject to epilepsy, or falling sickness. This did not, however, deter gourmands from feasting on them. When Aristophanes draws his ludicrous picture of the Athenian citizen who travelled to the country of the birds, we may be sure the Quail is not forgotten amongst the discordant chorus which welcomes him—

“A tit-lark and magpie, a cuckoo and pigeon,  
A hawk and di-dapper, woodpecker and widgeon,  
A turtle and stock dove, an osprey and Quail,  
Chaffinch, bullfinch, teal, linnet, red moor-hen and rail;  
Odsso! What a screaming and whistling they make!  
How they sidle and fidget, and noddle and shake!”\*

More trustworthy modern writers agree with the above in affirming that Quails on their migration invariably fly by night, and often alight on vessels in their weariness. One was at a small town on the coast in the month of May,

\* “The Birds,” Cary’s Translation, Act I., sc. iv.





and saw some fishing-boats come in with ten or a dozen sharks on board. These were opened in his presence, and each one contained from eight to a dozen Quails. There is, of course, a general shooting-match, which lasts two or three days, on the coast wherever they arrive.

Colonel Sykes states that the Common Quail is the identical species which was furnished to the Israelites in the wilderness. The word used in the original Hebrew for Quail is the same as that by which the bird is now known to the Arabians. The manner in which these Quails arrived and fell, as it were exhausted, on reaching the Israelites' encampment, is viewed by him as showing that although the birds were given miraculously (being promised before they came), still that they arrived in the same manner as they always arrive when on their ordinary migrations. He remarks further from this upon the perpetuation of an instinct (migratory) through upwards of 3,300 years.

Bishop Mant has some pretty lines on the arrival of the Quails and the persecution to which they are immediately subjected. After speaking of the mottled crake, and the way its delusive call leads on the searcher for it from place to place, he adds—

"Less likely of your aim to fail  
If with loud call the whistling Quail  
Attract you, 'mid the bladed wheat  
To spread the skilful snare, and cheat  
With mimic sounds his amorous ear,  
Intent the female's cry to hear.  
For now the vernal warmth invites  
From Afric's coasts their northward flights,  
And prompts to skim on nightly breeze  
Sicilian or Biscayan seas."

The reader will notice here how true to fact is the expression, "skimming on nightly breeze."

Temminck says, in mentioning the enormous numbers of Quails which migrate, that 100,000 of them have been taken near Nettuno in one day. Canon Tristram, too, observed enormous flights of Quails on the north coast of Algeria in two successive years. They came from the south during the night, and were on the plains in such numbers at daybreak that scores of sportsmen had only to shoot as fast as they could reload. There has been some discussion as to the meaning of "mother Quail" in the passage of Pliny cited above, and also named by other authorities. It is generally regarded as meaning simply a larger or fatter Quail than its kindred; but the name has been assigned by some to the landrail (*Crex*

*pratensis*). It is curious that this bird is known in France as Roi des Cailles, in Italy as Re di Quaglie, and in Germany as Wachtel-König. When the Quail escapes the above-mentioned dangers which greet its arrival, it betakes itself to open plains and rich grassy meadows, avoiding wooded countries. In early summer it frequents the standing corn, the crops of clover, lucerne, and the like. In September, like our partridge (of which it is in many respects a miniature), it is found in stubble fields, among the weeds growing by dry ponds, and in any crops which may yet be standing, and can afford it shelter. On the Continent it affects vineyards, not so much, it is said, on account of the fruit as to obtain the numerous small snails which then infest the vines. When put up, it makes more use of its legs than of its wings, like the red-legged partridge, and is never seen to perch on a tree. Its flight resembles that of the partridge, but it does not fly so far, and may on alighting be run down and sometimes even captured by the hand. More often in our own stubbles it rises before the sportsman and is brought down by his breechloader, much as Gay described partridge-shooting in

1711—

“See how the well-taught pointer leads the way;  
 The scent grows warm; he stops; he springs the prey;  
 The fluttering coveys from the stubble rise,  
 And on swift wing divide the sounding skies;  
 The scattering lead pursues the certain sight,  
 And death in thunder overtakes their flight.”

English poetry and folk-lore can scarcely attach themselves to a bird so seldom seen, save in certain pastoral districts of England, and so unfamiliar to country life and thought. But Kelly gives the symbolic meaning of the bird in the old Aryan myths. “The morning sun is represented in the Vedas,” he says,\* “by twin gods, and the ruddy dawn by the goddess Ushas, who is one in name and fact with the Greek *Eōs*. Her light was conceived to be a herd of red cows, and she herself figures in some hymns as a Quail. *Vartikā*, the Sanscrit name of the bird, corresponds etymologically with *ortyx*, its Greek name; and in the myths of Greece and Asia Minor the Quail is a symbol of light or heat.” It might have been from a Christian view of this myth that a tradition represents St. John as having been fond of a tame partridge or Quail during the later years of his life, and defending himself against the charge of trifling by the remark that the bow must sometimes be unbent. A similar bird appears in Bellini’s picture (in the National Gallery) of St. Jerome in his study.

\* “Curiosities of Indo-European Folk-lore,” p. 33.

Mr. Douce supplies a few particulars relating to Quail fights in his "Illustrations of Shakespeare." "Quail combats were well known among the ancients, and especially at Athens. Julius Pollux relates that a circle was made in which the birds were placed, and he whose Quail was driven out of the circle lost the stake, which was sometimes money and occasionally the Quails themselves. Another practice was to produce one of these birds, which being first smitten or filliped with the middle finger, a feather was then plucked from its head; if the Quail bore this operation without flinching, his master gained the stake, but lost if he ran away. The Chinese have been always extremely fond of Quail-fighting, as appears from most of the accounts of that people." The *regius morbus* or jaundice, it was believed at Rome, could be cured by swallowing the brain of a partridge or Quail in three glasses of wine. Those Quails which are brought over to London for the market are fattened before being sold. In Ireland, during the winter of 1836-7, it is upon record that one gentleman shot in one day on the stubble fields bordering Belfast Bay ten brace of Quails; but he who would enjoy this sport must seek it in the south of Europe and the warmer parts of the Continent. The island of Ortygia, off Syracuse, was so named from the abundance of this bird on its shores. Excellent shooting, too, may be had in India. The district round Trichinopoly is famous for its abundant supply of game; snipe, wild fowl of all kinds, partridges, and Quail are especially plentiful. Several species are found of the latter bird, the Florikin Quail, the Rain, Button, and Brown Quails. Best of all these varieties, however, is the Grey Quail, of which a hundred brace have been killed by a single gun in a day. The "Old Shekarri" gives a good account of this sport, and of the bird's habits, which will suit, with a few alterations, the characteristics of our bird. "The ordinary way of shooting all kinds of game in India is by beating it out with a line of men, but for sport I much prefer shooting in the early morning when the scent is good with a team of well-broken Sussex spaniels. The Grey Quail (*Tetrao coturnix*) is a pretty, bright-eyed little bird, not much larger than a lark, but resembling a partridge both in shape, plumage, and in the build of the legs. A 'bevy' of Quail generally consists of about a dozen birds, and as a rule they lie very close, and may easily be passed over if the sportsman has no dog with him. When they rise, they do so with a whirr, and instead of soaring sweep along in a straight line with great velocity.

"The shrill whistling of a Quail, which is generally repeated three times in rapid succession, is so seldom heard when the breeding season is over, that the males are

then said to have lost their voice. The nest is generally found among clover or long grass, and consists of a mere hollow in the ground lined with dry grass and moss. The eggs, from seven to twelve in number, are white, tinged with yellowish-red, speckled with brown. The female sits upon them three weeks, and the young follow her as soon as they leave the shell, commencing at once to feed upon seeds, grain, insects, and green leaves."\*

This life-history of the Quail may be fitly closed with an account of the American Quail's curious custom of lying close during snow. The same habit on a smaller scale prevails with our common partridge, multitudes of which are killed every severe winter by poachers, who take advantage of this peculiarity. "It is the habit of this bird to lie still, squatted in concentric 'huddles,' as they are technically called, composed of the whole bevy, seated like the radii of a circle with their tails inward, so long as snow, sleet, or rain continues to fall. So soon as it clears off, and the sun shines out, with a simultaneous effort, probably at a preconcerted signal, they all spring up at once with an impetus and rush so powerful as to carry them clear through a snow-drift many feet in depth; unless it be skinned over by a frozen crust, which is not to be penetrated by their utmost efforts. In this latter case, where the storm has been general over a large extent of country, the Quail are not unfrequently so near to extinction that but a bevy or two will be seen for years on ground where they have been previously found in abundance; and at such times if they be not spared and cherished, as they will be by all true sportsmen, they may be destroyed entirely throughout a whole region."†

\* "Sport in Many Lands," Vol. I., p. 321.

† Herbert's "Field Sports in the United States," Vol. I., p. 227.



Laboratory of Ornithology  
159 Sapsucker Woods Road  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York 14853









